

Halesowen

CHRONICLE



Thursday, May 4, 2017

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HIT-AND-RUN MURDER ARREST

Report by Mike Woods

THREE people have been arrested – one on suspicion of murder – after a man was killed in a suspected hit and run in Halesowen.

Benjamin Morse, aged 36, was hit by a dark hatchback at around 12.15am on Monday. He is believed to have been walking in Cherry Street when he was struck by the vehicle.

Medics battled to save his life but he was pronounced dead a short time later.

On Tuesday police revealed that a 21-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of murder. He has been released on police bail pending further enquiries.

Two other men, aged 32 and 19, were arrested on suspicion of assisting an offender and have also been released on police bail.

The family of Mr Morse, from Halesowen, in a statement said: "Benjamin was a kind and loving son, brother, uncle and friend who would do anything for anyone."

"He was sports mad, fun loving and an Arsenal fanatic and has left a huge hole in our lives – our family will never be the same again."

Information

"We appreciate the support from family, friends and the community but would ask that the police are left to do their job. Anyone who has any information please contact the police."

Detective Inspector Justin Spanner said: "Although the investigation is moving at a fast pace we still need to speak to anyone else who was in the car. Do the right thing and come forward. Our thoughts remain with the family of Mr Morse and specialist officers are supporting them at this difficult time."

Anyone with information is urged to call police on 101.

Homes being built on former school site

A FORMER school in Halesowen has been bulldozed to make way for some 30 homes.

Holt Road Primary School had been empty for almost 10 years before it was sold last year to make way for housing.

Building work has now begun on the near two-acre site, which was on the market for £1.35 million.

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SPEEDING

Boy racers using street as a racetrack

BOY racers are continuing to plague an area of Halesowen turning a street into their own racetrack.

Long Lane at Shell Corner has been labelled a hot spot for racing motorists by councillors and residents concerned at young drivers speeding up and down the road late at night.

Councillor Hilary Bills, who represents Halesowen North ward, said: "This is something that is very worrying."

A West Midlands Police spokesman said: "We will continue to patrol areas where we receive complaints for boy racing."

POLITICS

Voting takes place for region's mayor

THE people of the West Midlands vote today (Thursday) for their first 'Metro' Mayor in charge of a region covering the Black Country, Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry.

The candidates are James Burn (Green), Pete Durnell (UKIP), Beverley Nielsen (Liberal Democrat), Sion Simon (Labour Co-op), Graham Stevenson (Communist), Andy Street (Conservative). The move follows a devolution deal between the Government and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

TRAFFIC

Red route rolls out to stop bad parking

A £4,000 scheme to stamp out bad parking in Cradley Heath saw work start on a new 'red route' begin this week.

It means vehicles will be banned from parking on a mile-long stretch of Forge Lane, Lower High Street, Foxoak Street and Upper High Street.

Yellow lines were being removed and the red lines put down overnight on Tuesday with the new rules coming into force from today (Thursday).

The work is being done to prevent parking on the pavements and on narrow stretches of the road, which has been causing problems.

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A HOLE LOT OF ROAD TROUBLE



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Life for man who shot teenager dead

A GUNMAN who fatally wounded a teenager in a parked car before hiding from police in Dudley has been jailed for life.

Isaiah Wright-Young, of no fixed abode, was one of two men who opened fire on the car in which Kenichi Phillips sat while it was parked in Ladywood, Birmingham, in March 2016.

Wright-Young, 37, went into hiding after the murder but was discovered living in a flat in Dudley by police seven months later.

Kenichi, who was 18, was a passenger in the Seat Ibiza and was struck in the jaw and neck by one of the bullets. Two others in the car escaped uninjured but Kenichi collapsed and died in nearby alleyway.

Disharn Downie, 18, was arrested and convicted of Kenichi's murder, of attempted murder and attempted grievous bodily harm. He was jailed for 21 years in November. Dean Silvera, 37, was jailed for seven and a half years after he was found guilty of assisting an offender.

Isaiah Wright-Young was arrested in October in Dudley and charged

with murder, attempted murder, attempting grievous bodily harm and possession of firearms. He will serve at least 33 years.

Detective Inspector Jim Munro, who led the investigation, said: "Both Downie and Wright-Young intended to kill the occupants and it's only through luck alone that others weren't seriously hurt as a result."

Accused says he 'did not know' about guns deal

A MAN accused of 'pulling the strings' when two guns were handed to a criminal who claimed he thought it was a drugs deal.

Sunny Dhatt's fingerprint was on a shoe box that held the 9mm semi-automatic replica Glock handguns and a dozen bullets, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard. The box was found in the footwell of a VW Sharan driven by Sadaquat Ali, after the vehicle had been surrounded by armed police on the driveway of his home in Madeley Road, Dudley.

Four minutes earlier he had left the Spa supermarket car park in Lawnswood Road, Kingswinford, after undercover officers watched him collect something from a silver Seat with Jermal Simpson at the wheel on August 3 last year, said Mr Martyn Bowyer, prosecuting.

Ali has pleaded guilty to acquiring or purchasing the guns and ammunition, the jury heard. The prosecutor alleged that 26-year-old Dhatt and Khalad Uddin, aged 35, had organised the transfer of the weapons.

The Seat was stopped by armed police in Moss Grove, Kingswinford, and almost £2,000 cash was discovered hidden under a seat. Dhatt insisted he knew nothing about the guns and ammunition. He said he was friends with Simpson and they had been to the car park of a nearby Sainsbury's supermarket the previous day to collect cocaine, worth up to £13,000.

He claimed Uddin told him where to pick up the stash, which allegedly turned out to be sub standard and was to be returned to Uddin after Dhatt transferred it into the Adidas shoe box, the court heard.

Phones

There were 36 contacts between the mobile phones of the duo on the day of the alleged weapons transfer as well as contacts between Dhatt and Simpson and Uddin and Ali.

Mr Bowyer concluded: "Simpson was the delivery boy and Ali had been the collector with the strings being pulled from a safe distance by their puppet masters, Uddin and Dhatt."

Uddin was arrested at his home on October 19, while Dhatt was detained at a BMW dealership in Enfield.

Dhatt, of no fixed address, Uddin from Scholars Mews, Oxford, and Simpson, 24, of Parker Street, Bloxwich, all deny conspiring to sell or transfer prohibited firearms and ammunition. Simpson further pleads not guilty to selling or transferring two 9mm handguns and ammunition on August 3.

Free course at library for parents-to-be

PARENTS-TO-BE to be can take advantage of a free four week pre-natal course at Dudley Library. It starts on May 12 and runs each Friday from 10.30am until 2.30pm until June 2. To book a place, call Jackie on (01384) 813041 or Donna on (01384) 812933.

Payouts and few repairs but still hole lot of fury

TOP OF THE POTS

POTHOLEs are making headlines again this week with more reports of damaged roads from readers, some good news in Staffordshire and anger in the Black Country as one road is repaired – ahead of major works!

In Pensnett, council workers were spotted filling in holes on the High Street sparking comment on Twitter as the road is set undergo roadworks.

There is a £6 million scheme planned which will see it widened and have new pedestrian crossings. However ward councillor Judy Foster said action was needed now to deal with the hazardous road. She said: "The new scheme is at the High Oak End and we are aware that there are some ruts in the road at the junction with High Street near that location which might pose a hazard for pedestrians."

Meanwhile, work has at last begun repairing a succession of potholes and sunken drains around the junction 11 island of the M6.

Compensation

Figures revealed by the Chronicle last week showed payouts of £3,360 had been made to drivers for damage caused in the area over the last four years. In total compensation payments of almost £350,000 have been paid out by Staffordshire County Council because of damage caused by potholes in the last four years – with one driver receiving more than £4,600, the figures have revealed.

But reports are still coming in. Glenn Sealey of Cannock sent us a picture of a severe pothole on the road out of Cannock, in Heath Hayes.

He said: "For anyone hitting it goes in on a downward slide, and then hits the almost vertical wall meaning a small car could become trapped and as it would be under way a serious incident would occur. A large car could sustain damage. Anyone on a motorcycle is going to be off with the consequences of being hit by other traffic."

Jo Well reported a number of large deep potholes on the A449 between Stewponey junction and Lawnswood Rd junction in Kingswinford. She said: "There is a strong possibility of an accident on this busy, fast road as drivers swerve to avoid them."

Adrian Galis complained that Wombourne in South Staffordshire had been 'seemingly forgotten by Staffordshire highways department'.



Richard Sears reported a pothole at the entrance of the Chase Golf Club and Spa



Glenn Sealey, of Cannock, sent us a picture of a deep pothole on a road in Heath Hayes



A reader sent us a picture of this deep hole in Love Lane, Great Wyrley, regularly used as a rat run



In Pensnett workers were filling in holes on the High Street which is due to undergo roadworks

He said: "The whole village is blighted by potholes but one of the worst roads is a 200m stretch of Station Road starting at Ounsdale Road, there are at least 20 holes, some 3ins deep and others up to 3ft long. The potholes also continue down Bull Meadow Lane. Some holes in these roads were painted marked for repair months ago."

But even the repairs are being questioned. Staffordshire reader Richard Sears, of Hedgeside, reported a pothole at the entrance of the Chase Golf Club and Spa on Pottal Pool Road in Cannock in February.

He said: "On the 27th April I received an email from Staffordshire County Council informing me that the pothole had been fixed. On the 29th

April I visited the Golf Club and took the opportunity to inspect the repaired pothole. Indeed a repair had been made to the damaged area but unsurprisingly because the repair could best be described as shoddy, a pothole is already developing."

And another reader sent us a picture of a deep hole in Love Lane, Great Wyrley, which is regularly used as a rat run for traffic trying to escape the A34 Walsall Road through the village.

The Chronicle has invited readers to help us find the most pothole-plagued roads in the area which we will be flagging up to highways authorities and pushing for priority repairs. We will be revealing the most problematic areas soon.

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Man killed workmate with one vicious punch

A MAN from Yorkshire has been jailed for more than eight years after being found guilty of killing his colleague with a single punch.

Dean Hartley unleashed a vicious uppercut on Karl Swift in Halesowen town centre, knocking him unconscious. Mr Swift, 33, hit his head on the ground and died in hospital two days later.

Hartley, 30, lied to police claiming he found Mr Swift on the ground and that he must have fallen over.

After being charged he admitted intending to pervert the course of justice but denied manslaughter. A jury took just one hour and 22 minutes to unanimously find him guilty.

Judge James Burbidge QC sentenced him to a total of eight years and three months at Wolverhampton Crown Court.

The court heard Hartley had five previous convictions for violence and was subject to a suspended sentence for battery at the time he killed Mr Swift on September 8.

The pair were among a group of six workmates who had been drinking at the William Shenton pub. They had been arguing about football. Hartley, of Burnaby Crescent, Sheffield, told police he had been irritated by Mr Swift.

The group, who had all travelled from Yorkshire for work, was thrown out of the pub on Queensway, but Mr Swift had left on his own a few minutes earlier. Two men who admitted attempting to pervert the course of justice will be sentenced later.

Councillor leaves UKIP for the Tories

A UKIP councillor has defected to the Tories because he believes the party has become 'too radical'.

Councillor Paul Bradley, who represents the Amblecote ward, said he has gone as far as he can with UKIP following the successful Brexit campaign.

He has switched to the Conservatives because he feels uncomfortable some of the parties 'national flagstone issues'.

But he added that he wished the UKIP group in Dudley well.

Councillor Bradley said: "I have come as far as I can with the party. The national side has taken a much more radical stance."

"It will take them back years. It is too radical and it is not comfortable."

Work set to close road for a month

A ROAD is Kingswinford will be closed both ways until June 6 with delays expected.

Ridge Road is closed due to gas main work between Cot Lane and Kingsley Road.

Hospital gets £1m to invest in A&E

DUDLEY'S hospital trust has been awarded £1 million in Government funding to invest in its accident and emergency department.

Bosses at Dudley NHS Foundation Trust will spend the money on developing a new urgent care centre at Russells Hall Hospital.

The facility will help staff deal with patients coming into A&E more efficiently, relieving hospital resources and meeting waiting time targets.

The funding has come from the Department of Health, which allocated £56m to hospitals around the country, earlier this month.

A spokesman for the trust said: "We are absolutely thrilled to be receiving £1m funding to relieve pressure on our accident and emergency department.

This really is very good news for all of our patients.

"We plan to use the money to build a brand new urgent care centre integrated with our emergency department. This will allow a centralised point of access for patients who will be directed to A&E or the UCC depending on their clinical need."

Benefit

"Having the two services side by side will mean patients will benefit from a seamless service with clinicians from primary care and the hospital working even more closely together."

The money from the Government for hospitals, totalling £55.98m, forms part of the £100m A&E

capital funding outlined in the spring Budget by Chancellor Philip Hammond.

It is hoped that the cash can help hospitals across the country meet A&E targets of admitting, transferring and discharging 95 per cent of patients within four hours and ease pressure in time for winter.

Hospital trusts have outlined plans to achieve this, which include being able to stream primary care and place GP practices within their A&E departments. Seventy NHS hospitals nationwide have received the funding.

Russells Hall faced a challenging winter, which saw record numbers filling into A&E, putting strain on resources.

NEWS IN BRIEF

TV comic Joe in go-kart appeal

BIRMINGHAM comedian Joe Lycett is backing a bid to replace go-karts wrecked by vandals – as donations raced towards £1,000 in just days.

Staff at Sycamore Adventure Centre in Dudley, which offers free play sessions for youngsters, launched an appeal for £3,000 to replace the karts left beyond repair after vandals scaled a fence at the centre.

Having made a donation, TV comic Joe, who has appeared on Taskmaster and Live At The Apollo, took to Twitter to urge his 169,000 followers to back the campaign.

Emily cooks up place in finals

A CATERING student has made it through to the grand finals of a national competition, taking part in a range of cooking challenges.

Emily Winnitt, who attends Halesowen College, was chosen as a judge's wild card entry and took part in the grand final of the Nestle Toque d'Or competition at the end of March.

She will find out at an awards ceremony at the Dorchester Hotel in London on May 12 if she is a winner.

During the competition she had to cook a fine dining meal for 60 people and complete a wine tasting course.

Bishop opens his garden for causes

THE Bishop of Dudley is opening his garden to the public for one day.

The Rt Rev Graham Usher will be raising funds for the Three Choirs Festival and the Churches Housing Association of Dudley and district's women's refuge.

The garden at The Bishop's House, Bishop's Walk, Cradley Heath, will be open from 11.30am to 4pm on Saturday, May 13.

Admission is £3 for adults and free for accompanied children under 12.

Free hall stall offer for teenage entrepreneurs

YOUNG entrepreneurs can have a free stall at the first Teenage Market to be held at Himley Hall and Park.

The Teenage Market is taking place on Sunday, June 18, from 11am to 5pm. Anyone aged 13 to 23 is eligible. Twenty stalls are up for grabs on a first-come, first-served basis. Young musicians and entertainers are also encouraged to apply for a performance slot. To book, go to www.theteenagemarket.co.uk/events/himley-hall-teen-age-market/

Mini motorist hurt

A WOMAN motorist in Mini was taken to hospital for a check up after complaining of neck pain following a crash with a Honda Accord on Saturday.

The smash in Sedgley Road East, Tipton was at 12.30pm. The Mini passenger and Honda driver were unhurt.

£120k extra made by trust on staff parking

THE trust which runs Russells Hall Hospital has made £120,000 extra since it put up parking charges for staff, it has been revealed.

Costs for hospital workers were increased during 2012/13 and it has now emerged in the three years that followed the Dudley Group NHS Trust raked in an extra £120,000.

The information was revealed under the Freedom of Information Act and showed large increases in cash generated from the pockets of doctors, nurses and other staff.

Money from staff parking brought in £323,000 in 2011/12 but a rise in charges saw the total rise to £389,000 the following year.

It then increased to £432,000 in 2013/14 and £443,000 in 2014/15, which were the most recent figures made available.

Hospital bosses said the rise in money generated was down to parking fees going up.

When the changes were made, chiefs defended the move and said they 'have to look at opportunities to increase our income'.

However, they also pointed out workers had the opportunity to sign up to a salary sacrifice scheme which would see them pay less due to savings on tax and national insurance.

Shameful

The hikes for staff parking were then followed by rises for patients in 2015, which were described as 'shameful' by campaigners.

More than 2,600 staff use the car park on a regular basis.

Full-time workers pay £19.50 a month, which went up from £15, while staff who use the site less often now pay £9.75 a month compared to £7.50 in 2011/12. Trust chief executive Diane Wake said: "As highlighted in the Freedom of Information response, car parking charges for staff increased after 2011/12."

Councillor Paul Brothwood, UKIP group leader in Dudley, described the amount staff are being made to pay for parking as 'immoral'.

He added: "These poor staff have had limited pay rises over a substantial period of time. Hospitals are saying they are short of money and they have got to charge staff and patients more. It's nonsense, the money is not being spent on the right things."

In January, it was revealed that every single parking fine appealed at Russells Hall Hospital over the financial year 2015/16 was successfully overturned.

This dog loves life in the fast lane



Owner Keiran Samra with Titan, the dog that brought the M5 in the Black Country to a standstill

HE is the adventurous dog who brought the M5 in the Black Country to a standstill.

Titan, the four-year-old Akita escaped from a garden in West Bromwich High Street and made a beeline straight for the motorway.

He trotted onto the M5 at Junction 1 in West Bromwich on Thursday morning, leading emergency services to close both carriageways while they tried to collar him.

The 22-year-old told the Express & Star: "When Titan got back he was panting away – he was worn out. He loves running

Traffic remained stationary for around an hour while people tried to detain Titan, whose owner Keiran Samra lives just a couple of hundred yards from the M5.

He was eventually caught, leaving bemused drivers to continue on their way and his owner Mr Samra embarrassed.

The 22-year-old told the Express & Star: "When Titan got back he was panting away – he was worn out. He loves running

about and he's actually our second dog who has ended up on the motorway!

"At the time it was horrible but now I'm laughing about it. I do feel a bit embarrassed because of the delays everyone faced and the trouble the police went through, but I'm glad he's safe."

It is the second time the pet has escaped from the family's garden in recent weeks.

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Public meeting for rail users

A RAIL user group will host rail industry representatives at its public meeting in Kidderminster.

The Stourbridge Line User Group focuses on the Worcester-Kidderminster-Stourbridge-Birmingham line. Anyone can attend to ask questions about plans for train services.

"This year's event comes at an exciting time for the local rail service," said William Whiting, acting chair of the Stourbridge Line User Group. "The new West Midlands rail franchise will be announced a month or two after the meeting and we will hear from West Midlands Rail, which will be leading the management of local rail services in the whole region."

The public meeting is at 7.30pm on Tuesday, May 9, at the King & Castle bar in the Severn Valley Railway's Kidderminster Town station. Visit www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info

Fears over jobs at broker's chain

JOBS could be at risk at an insurance broker's 10 branches in the Black Country and Staffordshire. Swinton has announced plans to review 84 of its 194 high street branches and axe 900 jobs by the end of this year.

The firm has stores in High Street, Cradley Heath; High Street, Halesowen; Darlington Street, Wolverhampton; High Street, Dudley; Bridge Street, Walsall; Foster Street East, Stourbridge and Lower Mill Street, Kidderminster.

Ricky adds Arena date

COMEDIAN Ricky Gervais has added another Birmingham date to his tour.

The Office and Extras star is returning to the stage with his first stand-up tour in seven years. The tour, Humanity, visits Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena on June 28 and now also on new date June 27.



Shayne Ward, who is a team manager



Blue singer Lee Ryan



Reality star Calum Best



Footballer Wayne Bridge



Actor Jake Wood



Katie Price, signed up as a boss too

WITH the celebrity list growing longer and longer, tickets for a charity football match at Banks's Stadium are rapidly being snapped up.

The star-studded event is raising money for the Smile for Joel and Compton Hospice charities with Katie Price and singer Shayne Ward signed up to manage the two celebrity teams.

Taking place at the Walsall FC ground on May 13, tickets initially went on sale for the HomeServe stand only but demand was so great they also opened up the lower tier of the

Tile Choice stand. And many of the blocks in this tier are now sold out too.

The Smile for Joel charity was set up in memory of tragic Saddlers fans Joel Richards, Patrick Evans and Adrian Evans from the Black Country who were shot dead in the Tunisian beach terror attack. Nineteen-year-old Joel's mother Suzi and brother Owen, who survived the attack when he was only 16, formed the charity which raises money to support families who are victims of traumatic bereavement.

The list of celebrities confirmed so far include members of boy band Blue Lee Ryan Simon Webbe and Antony Costa, along with Steps singer Lee

Latchford-Evans. Meanwhile, there are X Factor stars Stevi Ritchie and Che Chesterman, plus 91 star Jimmy Constable and MC Harvey from So Solid Crew.

Footballer

Actors include Jake Wood (Max Branning in EastEnders); Oliver Phelps (George Weasley in Harry Potter); along with other EastEnders actors Dean Gaffney, Matt Lapinskas, Tony Discipline and Jamie Borthwick.

From the world of sport are ex-footballer Wayne Bridge, boxers Martin Gethin and Joe Calzaghe; Frankie

Gavin and Pete McDonagh; and Jamie O'Hara (former Wolves footballer).

A number of TV presenters are confirmed including Jeff Brazier; Rocket and Adam Smith (Soccer AM) and Gavin Ramjattan.

But stars of reality TV are turning out in force, with such names as Calum Best (Celebrity Big Brother); Nev Wilshire (Call Centre); Max Morley (Love Island Winner); Austin Armacost (Celebrity Big Brother); Liam Gatsby (The Only Way Is Essex) and fellow TOWIE star James 'Arg' Argent. Tickets are £10 adults and £5 juniors from the stadium ticket office on 01922 651 416.

33 now face action over terror attack in Tunisia

THIRTY-THREE people are being prosecuted over the Tunisia hotel massacre which left 30 British holidaymakers – including three members of a Black Country family – dead, it has been reported.

Members of the security forces and hotel guards are believed to be among those charged with failing to help tourists.

A British judge has already condemned the police response to the deadly attack on the resort as 'at best shambolic, at worst cowardly' at the victims' inquests.

Suzi Richards, from Wednesbury, who lost her son, brother and father in the attack, said she had not been informed about the prosecutions.

Joel Richards, aged 19, his grandfather Patrick Evans, 78, and uncle Adrian Evans, 44, a Sandwell Council worker from Bilston, died as gunman Seifeddine Rezgui shot tourists at the Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel in 2015.

Mr Richards' son Owen, who was 16 at the time, survived the attack at the resort of Port El Kantaoui.

Sofiene Sliti, a spokesman for the Tunisian investigation, said: "The trial on the attack at the Imperial Marhaba Hotel will begin on May 26."

Failing

It had previously been revealed that six hotel security guards had been charged for failing to protect holidaymakers.

Ms Richards said: "I knew there had been several arrests but certainly not 33. It is very upsetting not to be kept in the loop. We have never been given an option to attend, it is something we would have to fund ourselves. There has been very little communication from Tunisia."

The inquests heard how police and tourist security 'deliberately and unjustifiably slowed their response' as holidaymakers fled for their lives.

REVIEW: *Wicked* at the Birmingham Hippodrome

<p

Community open day at the brewery

A BLACK Country brewery is opening its doors for an industry event next month. Brewers in the Community will celebrate the important contribution independent breweries make to communities.

The initiative, organised by the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), runs from June 15 to 18.

SIBA is encouraging brewing members to organise open days around the national celebration day Beer Day Britain, which will take place on June 15.

Sadler's Ales is holding its open day for connoisseurs at its Brewhouse and Bar, Conyers Trading Estate, Station Drive, Lye, on Saturday, June 17 from 12 noon at £20 per person - which includes a tour, ploughman's lunch and two pints of its beers. Stone's Limestone Brewery has a tour on June 16 costing £15 per person from 7pm to 10pm.

There will also be a Breakfast at the Brewery event on June 18 featuring a display of cars, vans, and bikes.

Model rail fans gauge interest

STOURBRIDGE Railway Society's next model railway exhibition is on this weekend at The Bonded Warehouse, in Canal Street, Stourbridge.

It will be open from 10am to 5pm on Saturday and 10am to 4.30pm on Sunday. Attractions will include 13 layouts covering all popular gauges.

There will also be trade stands and demonstrations, free car parking and refreshments available. Entrance costs £3 for adults, £2 children and pensioners and £9 for a family of four.

Narrowboat trips are available for an extra charge.

The animal lover took a substantial

A KEEN hiker is preparing to take on his latest challenge - to walk the length of the Cotswold Way in one day.

Dan Hall, from Stourbridge, plans to trek the full 65-mile route in the summer and has set himself a target of finishing in under 24 hours.

This will raise money for a charity close to his heart - the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

The animal lover took a substantial

cut in salary some years ago to take a job with the West Midland Safari Park at Bewdley. It was there that he first came into contact with the trust and its work.

He said: "They came to the safari park to carry out a breeding and conservation project involving adders, and it was something I'd independently looked at in Kinver where a number of adders can be found."

"There were other projects I'd been interested in setting up at the safari park but couldn't do so through lack of funding, so I'm very keen to raise money for this very worthy cause."

It is the latest in a long line of fundraising activities taken on by the 38-year-old, who now works as a logistics manager for a firm in Birmingham. His Cotswold venture takes place on the first weekend in July.

RECYCLING points across Dudley borough are to be scrapped. The recycle bins include Birmingham Street in Halesowen and Toys Lane in Colley Gate, which will close from June 1.

The bins allow residents to drop off any extra recyclable rubbish including glass, textiles, cardboard, paper, card, plastic, cans and cartons. But bosses have decided to remove them because they are being abused and people are fly-tipping around the bins.

Getting rid of the 12 banks will also save the cash-strapped council £45,000.

Opposition councillor Patrick Harley has slammed the decision and blamed the council for not emptying the bins often enough.

He said: "If the council emptied the bins more frequently they wouldn't be full. Obviously they're overused. If people are dumping their stuff at the side of the bins it's because they can't get it in the recycle containers."

"The service is a really popular measure and it shouldn't be taken away because it'll result in even more fly-tipping in the countryside."

The bins were rolled out across the borough around 15 years ago and proved successful.

However, a council document states that the system is 'not cost effective' and recorded tonnage from the sites during the first six months of 2016/17 was little more than 365 ton, equalling just four per cent of the overall dry recycling collected by the council.

Councillor Hilary Bills, cabinet member for environmental services, said previous recycling points had also been removed due to fly-tipping.

She said: "Everyone has recycling now through the kerbside bags so we're finding the bins are being abused more by businesses and some people were even coming from outside the borough. When the recycling bank is full people are fly-tipping around them so we had to give it a rethink. The system has been abused."

Lorra singers have a go at Cilla star role

HUNDREDS are expected to turn out to auditions to find the West Midlands' next singing star for a lead role in a stage musical later this year.

Cilla: The Musical will be staged at Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre in October and auditions are now open for the role of Cilla Black, the Liverpudian singer who went on to become a Saturday night TV star.

Auditions take place on Tuesday, May 9, from 9am at the city centre theatre with hundreds of applicants already registered to attend and many more expected at the open auditions on the day. Bill Kenwright and Laurie Mansfield present the new musical about the life of Cilla October 10-14. See cillathemusical.com website.

Dan's trek is the Way to aid funding



Dan Hall planning his route for his trek from Bath to Cheltenham along an ancient route in the Cotswolds

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Airport car park fees should not be sky high

ALONG with bogus charges for car hire, airport car parking charges are one of the great holiday rip-offs of modern times.

In a sensible world, there is no reason whatsoever why a multi-storey car park at an airport should cost more than in any major town or city. Logically, it ought to be less. After all, airports are large, spacious out-of-town sites, and nobody goes there for any reason other than to get a plane.

Yet, at Birmingham Airport for example, the official NCP car park charges £36 a day. For a two-week holiday, that could be more than the cost of the flight.

Little wonder then that people turn to the cheaper "valet parking" services, where a driver collects your car from the airport, parks it in a supposedly secure place for the duration of the trip, and then delivers it to you on your return.

But it now emerges that some of the operators have a slightly unusual definition of "secure parking". Lichfield couple David and Julia O'Neill returned from a fortnight in Vietnam to be hit with a parking ticket. It emerged that the valet parking operator, which charged them £100 for secure parking at Heathrow, had simply dumped their vehicle in a public car park, and not paid the correct fees. Worse still, an investigation revealed that hundreds of other cars had been left at public car parks, many with Heathrow barrier tickets on display, an open invitation to thieves who knew the owners were on holiday. Unbelievable.



EDMUND King, the president of the AA, has come up with a novel idea to raise money for investment in Britain's overcrowded roads. Instead of screwing motorists for every last penny in road tax, fuel duty, and speeding fines, he suggests that business or even sports clubs could pay to have roads renamed after them. This has led to speculation that the M6 could be named after Manchester United. Not a bad idea, it is after all how most Manchester United fans get to Old Trafford. I think the M25 would probably be more appropriate, though.



WHEN Jeremy Corbyn made his pre-election pledge of four extra bank holidays in honour of the UK's four patron saints, he no doubt thought it was a sure-fire winner. After all, who is going to object to some extra time off work, and what is there not to like about celebrating national unity?

Two problems. First of all, chances are that many employers will simply knock the extra four days off their workers' annual leave entitlement. Secondly, St David's Day is March 1, St Patrick's March 17, St George's April 23, and St David's November 30. So instead of being able to take time off at their own choosing, Mr Corbyn is telling people to take time off in winter. Good luck with that one.



Wiki co-founder hopes to ensure truth will out



Hand-clap – Kim Jong-Un, leader of North Korea, with his unique haircut



Hand-some – Thandie Newton as DCI Roz Huntley in *In the Line of Duty*



Handy – Wikipedia's Jimmy Wales, who is promising to eradicate the scourge of 'fake news'

Jimmy's mission and that's a fact

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



I SUGGESTED a few days ago that a Manx kipper probably has no tail. A reader says this shortcoming is more than made up for by its third leg.

JIMMY Wales, co-founder of Wikipedia, is planning a news service called Wikitribune to fight fake news. Wales says it will deliver "high-quality, fact-based information." Well, good luck with that. It's just that after nearly 50 years in this game, I have never actually encountered neutral news, nor met a single unbiased journalist. Every reporter, columnist, commentator and pundit believes he or she occupies the exact epicentre of the very centre ground of rational thought. And every reader or viewer is equally convinced that the most accurate, insightful and unbiased reports are the ones that exactly reflect their own views. One man's "high quality, fact-based information" is another man's fascist / commie propaganda. Indeed, the only truly rational, considered and unerringly accurate column is this one.

MIND you, no matter how much one strives for accuracy, there are always heffalump traps. In this election campaign it's the Farron / Fallon thing. Tim Farron is the Lib-Dem leader. Sir Michael Fallon is the defence secretary. Tim is an evangelical Christian who talks to God. Michael is a career Tory who talks to a vicar's daughter. Confusion, confusion.

OUR changing language. A reader tells me his local GP surgery has a sign warning about a hitch with the electronic log-in system: "Please do not use the Jayex machine to arrive your child for Baby Clinic." This reminds me that my annual blood-pressure appointment is approaching. Next month I must arrive myself at the clinic. I must also arrive a urine sample.

AFTER the trauma of her above-the-wrist am-

putation in *Line of Duty* (BBC1), didn't DCI Roz Huntley (Thandie Newton) seem remarkably casual about asking her husband for a divorce? Quite off-handed.

IT was Woody Allen who famously observed: "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." A report from Iraq this week illustrates perfectly the sheer unpredictable, unfair cussedness of life. Three Islamic State fighters had apparently had enough of fighting and decided to surrender. Naturally, they left their weapons behind as they marched toward the enemy lines. On the way, unarmed and unaware, they were attacked and gored to death by wild boars.

YOU know what this general election campaign is missing? A new social group or two. In previous elections, the parties have identified and fought for the support of Worcester Woman and Mondeo Man. This time, who will be banging on doors to secure the votes of Seaside Strugglers, Lesbian Vapers and the Tring Transgenders?

AS attention turns once again to North Korea, the secretive state keeps its ultimate secret very secret indeed. The regime has murdered hundreds of Kim Jong-Un's ministers, officials and even relations. Yet his hairdresser survives. Bizarre.

SCIENTISTS at Cambridge believe a moth larva known as a wax worm may be able to rid the world of unwanted shopping bags thanks to its unique ability to digest plastic. I'm reminded

of the 1970s BBC drama *Doomwatch* which began with an airliner crashing after all the plastic on board suddenly melted. It emerged that a plastic-eating virus had escaped from a rogue laboratory. Younger readers may rejoice at today's promise of plastic-eating moths. Older readers will recall the horror on the pilot's face in *Doomwatch* as his control stick turned to goo in his hands . . .

MEANWHILE, ordinary moths are having a wonderful time thanks to the withdrawal, on safety grounds, of old-fashioned mothballs. My pure Merino sweater has emerged from the drawer looking like a string vest. A very expensive string vest.

BEAVERS, lynxes, wolves, elk? As the debate rages over whether to reintroduce big mammals into the British countryside, a friend is in despair. His small but perfectly trimmed lawn is his pride and joy, yet every night it is being ripped up and left horribly pot-holed. He would happily see the reintroduction of any animals – so long as they eat badgers.

THE online version of this column recently showed a car towing a caravan with the headline "What about the other mental conditions?" This was an unfortunate juxtaposition. I was not implying that caravanning is a psychological problem, or that there's anything bizarre about dragging your dirty crockery, unwashed clothes and half-full chemical toilets around the country while creating long traffic jams. Perfectly rational behaviour.

WHILE it may be magnanimous to guarantee EU workers the right to remain in the UK for all time, how does Labour's Brexit policy serve the interests of the Great British Public? 'Labour – Putting Foreigners First' is a bold campaign slogan but who's going to vote for it?

TALKING POINT



Now that's what I call a waste of money

WE'VE all seen the ads for them. Most have probably even got one. You've guessed it . . . compilation albums.

No, not a selection of a band's greatest hits, or a film or TV soundtrack.

I can even stomach the latest chart tunes from Now whatever number it is up to these days.

No, I refer to the pointless and completely random ones rolled out at those special times of the year, Mother's Day, Valentine's, Father's Day, for example. You know the sort I mean . . .

I can picture the advert now. "Treat your dad to The Best Stuck in Congestion on the M25 on a Friday Night Rush Hour Album in the World . . . Ever, featuring the likes of Baby You Can Drive My Car, Slow Down, Stuck in the Middle With You, Roadblock and other such classics."

They are billed as the ideal gift for whatever occasion it is, featuring all your mum's/dad's/girlfriend's/boyfriend's/whoever-it-may-be's favourites.

Really? How can whoever came up with the tracklist possibly know that?

Sure, like all such albums there may be one or two good ones on there. But how could anyone compiling the list know what I would want to listen to?

The only people I would assume benefit from this commercial enterprise are the artists, raking in their royalties, and the manufacturers.

Even the 'Now' franchise has surpassed itself with its latest offerings. Now That's What I Call A Song (?) – that's a matter of opinion – and Now That's What I Call Running. I've also seen advertised children's versions of current top tunes, Songs By Kids For Kids, apparently, and Sing Your Heart Out 2017. Exactly the pointless collections I'm talking about.

We all have CDs we like to listen to whenever the mood takes us, and it's nice to look back at ones bought by a loved one as a present. But, no offence, please do not spend your hard-earned on one of those No1 Songs For Hosting a Dinner Party or Barbecue compilations for me. Incidentally, the latter is probably the only album you will find Fire! and Smoke Gets In Your Eyes just thrown together.

However, if you happen to know the favourite song of my top 15 or 20 acts and put that together, you've got yourself a deal – Now That's What I Call The Ultimate Bespoke Party Album In My Collection Ever.

I don't need anyone to tell me, or at least try to guess, what I would like to listen while ironing or out jogging.

Christmas, however? That's a different matter. Classic tunes (with the odd exception, of course), and ideal for getting everyone in the festive spirit. And if you don't appreciate a bit of Nat King Cole maybe it's time to roast your old CDs on an open fire instead.

Mind you, October is too early to play festive tunes in the shops though.

MARK SHIPP

Home should be the number one priority

WHEN I see bereft parents on TV, I remember at the age of seven and eight, because we did not have accommodation, I was shipped from man to grandma to mum whilst dad lived elsewhere. I did not starve, even under rationing, and was washed and dressed.

I had little idea of the real trauma my parents were undergoing and it was only in later life I was told that they had deliberately kept this from me. The only time I saw the veil lifted was, on one of the occasions we were kicked out of where we were renting, seeing my pregnant mother in tears sitting on a chair in the street. Because of my

experiences as a kid, when I became engaged I made it a priority above all else that we got together enough cash for a deposit on a home.

The present furor about lack of affordable housing and each party blaming the other for not building enough is a red herring. What I blame both parties for is not the failure to build homes, it is watching from the sidelines and not intervening as the population soars and knowing that the goal posts will continue to be moved.

ALAN M ETHERIDGE
Dudley

Burning wood not 'greener'

THERE was an announcement on April 22 that, for the first time since the start of the Industrial Revolution, this country had gone a whole 24-hour period without using coal to fuel our generators.

Those making this announcement made a big deal of this, saying we're becoming 'greener' by doing this.

We all must be concerned about the tons of carbon dioxide and other noxious gases being put out by the old coal burning power stations so must be pleased about this fact. But we don't have sufficient capacity in electricity production from solar or wind power, along with our ageing nuclear power stations, to meet our needs on a permanent basis.

More importantly, we have converted some coal burning power stations to burn wood. When burning wood more noxious products enter the atmosphere than when we burn coal!

M GOUGH
Wombourne

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

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expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Code of Practice: Our policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. The Chronicles adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at

Conifer wood may be cause of smoking chimney problems

SEVERAL weeks ago, you reported that Dudley Council were threatening to sue people who had smoking chimneys.

A bit late I know, but had anyone bothered to notify people who had installed wood burning stoves that they were asking for trouble if they tried burning conifer tree wood?

Lots of people had conifer hedging which they had had cut down, and possibly tried burning the wood indoors.

When we had our hedge cut down, we were told not to try burning it indoors as the tar content in the wood could block the chimney.

PETER COLE
Kingswinford

Good news week for hedgehogs

WE are writing to let your readers know that it's Hedgehog Awareness Week this week!

We organise Hedgehog Awareness Week to highlight the problems hedgehogs face and how to help them. Lots of tips to make sure our prickly friends stay safe can be found on our website at www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

Efforts are focussed on our 'Hedgehog Heroes' campaign. We are asking councils, tool hire companies, etc, to place waterproof stickers onto their cutting machines that remind operatives to check for hedgehogs before starting work.

We are providing the stickers free of charge and adding those sending photographs of the stickers 'in action' to the Hedgehog Heroes Roll of Honour on the website!

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8 Giant strides towards help on fostering

A GROUND-BREAKING short film highlighting the need for foster carers who can help keep brothers and sisters in care together across the Midlands has been launched.

The film, called Giant, has been devised to blend the concepts of people acting as 'giants' in society by providing support for one another. It was being launched at Birmingham's Everyman cinema.

Twelve local authorities spent 18 months working the Reel Twenty Five film production. They were Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Staffordshire, Coventry, Birmingham, Solihull, Telford and Wrekin, Leicester City, Leicestershire, Worcestershire, Stoke and Derby.

Jim Leivers, director of children's services at Sandwell council said: "This is a really high quality film that helps to get across the urgent need we have for people to step forward who have that extra space to help keep brothers and sisters together."

The film is three minutes long. It tells the story of Jack and Ellie – a brother and sister who want to stay together when they are find themselves in foster care.

The concept of giant in the film refers to foster carers in society acting as giants as they provide support.

It also highlights the strong bond and relationships that brothers and sisters have as they look up and care for each other becoming giants to each other in life.

Band announces botanical gig date

A BAND is performing at Birmingham botanical gardens next weekend. Alveley Village Band, which meets every Saturday morning between 9.30am and 11.30am at Alveley Sports Club will be at the gardens on Sunday.

The band will perform at Swindon Church Hall on June 10, St Mary's Street Open Gardens in Bridgnorth June 25 and St Mary's Church in Alveley on July 16.

New players are welcome to join. For more information visit alveleyvillageband.com.



From left, Pc Emma Seville, Karen Simms and Steve Peach, host for the night



Members of the community in Tipton, with the £15,000 cheque for projects



Chief Inspector Jane Bailey



James Marsh, Little Nippers Youth project



Luke Downing from the Community Skip Day Project



Anam Choudary from the Come Dine with Neighbours project

Spreading the love for Tipton

A COMMUNITY came together to honour the success of a group which celebrates the best of a Black Country town.

The Tipton Awards evening, organised by Love Tipton, gave community champions the chance to proudly show off what they are planning to do for their area.

Love Tipton has been donated £15,500 from Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson's 'Active Citizens Fund' to spend on community activities.

missioner David Jamieson's 'Active Citizens Fund' to spend on community activities.

The cash has funded a number of new groups which have been created in Tipton, including the Little Nippers Kids Club – which offers play sessions for children – as well as the setting up of a new under-sevens team at Tipton Town FC.

Schoolchildren can take advantage of a new uniform exchange service as part of The 3R's, while two free skips

will be set up in Princes End as part of a community skip programme.

Another group boosted by funding was Come Dine With Neighbours, which aims to use food to 'connect residents, break down barriers and address local issues' at the Jubilee Park community centre. It runs twice a month for 12 months.

A fun day will take place in Princes End on Monday, while training will also be given to community first aiders.

The training will aim to create a network of volunteer first aiders around the area who will be able to respond to minor incidents and in the event of more serious incidents offer first aid until professional help arrives.

Pc Emma Seville said: "This has been going on for 18 months or so – a group of partners from Tipton including the council, police and community members came together to form Love Tipton."

"We got a pot of money from the PCC's office from the Active Citizens Fund.

"We asked the community what they wanted the money spent on and ran workshops to help community groups apply for funding.

"The evening was a celebration of the work that Love Tipton has done.

"And it also allowed the different groups to give a presentation and tell everybody about what they are going to be doing."



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Fri 14 to Mon 17 Jul

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- ✓ Entertainment on one night
- ✓ Excursion to Dawlish & Teignmouth
- ✓ Optional excursion to Plymouth (£7.99pp)
- ✓ Return coach travel from Halesowen

BLACKPOOL & LIVERPOOL WEEKEND

Fri 4 to Mon 7 Aug

Your break includes

- ✓ 3 nights DBB at the Chequers Plaza Hotel, Blackpool
- ✓ Entertainment on one night
- ✓ Excursion to Liverpool
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- ✓ Return coach travel from Halesowen

DELIGHTFUL DEVON WEEKEND

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Dicing with death on the railway track



A reckless trespasser filmed on the railway tracks in Cradley Heath during the early hours had a lucky escape

IT is 5.20am – a man lumbers on to the platform at a Black Country railway station. He steps down on to the tracks, appearing to search for something before the lights of a train appear round the corner.

Just in time, the man leaps and rolls on to the platform at he Cradley Heath Station. This CCTV footage, captured in a screen grab, shows one of 588 trespass incidents in the

West Midlands last year. The video released by the British Transport Police was taken on December 13 from the Cradley Heath stop, on the line between Stourbridge and Birmingham Moor Street.

It has been released as part of a campaign to raise awareness as more people than ever in the West Midlands are endangering their lives.

Mosque move bid cost £300k

DUDLEY Central Mosque spent almost £300,000 in its failed battle to move to a new site in the town.

The cash included donations from the community to help draw up plans and pay legal costs.

Leaders attempted to keep their bid to build a new mosque alive by appealing against Dudley Council's refusal of the project in Hall Street. The saga was brought to an end in 2015 when Court of Appeal judges unanimously

ruled in favour of Dudley Council over its move to buy back the land in Hall Street from the Dudley Muslim Association (DMA).

It comes as Muslim leaders say they are 'disappointed' by lack of communication with the council over finding a site for the mosque since the end of the legal battle over the Hall Street site.

The legal fight saw the DMA plough in hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The central mosque, a registered charity, also helped by raising money.

Ammar Khan, a former treasurer of the central mosque, admitted it had

been painful to see so much money go into the project and not be any closer to securing their new mosque.

Accounts showed the Dudley Central Mosque and Muslim Community Centre spent £141,113 on the 'new mosque project' in 2014 and £149,277 in 2015 during the court battle with Dudley Council.

Mr Khan said: "It has been almost 20 years of struggle and we are nowhere. We have received no communication from the council."

He added: "There is no appetite for another battle."

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Walsall's Manager Jon Whitney tees off during the contest



Stan Petrov and John Hartson joke around



First team players get set for the day to raise money for charity



Chris Nicholls and Martin O'Connor at Walsall Golf Club



Former Walsall winger John Hodge



Current Saddlers midfielder, Kieron Morris, tries his luck on the putting green

Saddlers chip in for charity

WALSALL stars past and present took to the fairways to raise funds for leading cancer charity, The John Hartson Foundation.

Former Baggies striker Hartson was diagnosed with testicular cancer back in 2009 and the disease going on to spread to his lungs and brain.

But the Welshman defied the odds to beat the condition and has since raised more than £700,000 to help

men who find themselves in a similar position.

Last Wednesday he was joined by a host of Saddlers stars including boss Jon Whitney and players Jason McCarthy, Scott Laird, George Dobson, Liam Kinsella and Eoghan O'Connell at a fundraiser at Walsall Golf Club. Former players Michael Ricketts and Martin O'Connor also attended as well as ex-managers Kenny Hibbitt and Kenny Mower.

"It's great to be able to raise

awareness of John's charity," Whitney said.

"There has been a really good turnout. We've got players from the first-team squad. Ian Sharps (coach) is playing but Neil Cutler bottled it.

Commercial

"It's a great cause and something we really need to highlight and it's fantastic to see John and Stan Petrov because they have both done so much for charity."

Former Walsall midfielder Wayne

Thomas – who is now commercial manager at the Banks's Stadium – said he hopes the golf day will become an annual event.

"It was our inaugural golf day and hopefully it was the first of many," he said.

"When I was a player we had a great golf day and it was something that when I came back I wanted to get going again."

"Teams play with a current player or manager. We had 18 ex or current

players plus John Hartson and Stan Petrov.

"The players have been fully supportive of it."

"And you can't underestimate how much the commercial partners and fans are looking forward to having three or four hours with a player."

"Walsall Football Club has a great relationship with Walsall Golf Club because we sponsor the disabled golf events they run – so it was great to hold this there as well."

Mayor's civic fundraising with walking football

THE Mayor of Dudley is inviting people to join him at a charity walking football tournament in Halesowen later this month.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif is organising a six-a-side tournament of the more leisurely form of the game at Powerleague on Friday, May 19, and is inviting people to enter teams. It will be the final fundraising event of his year in office.

Starting at 6pm, it costs £5 per player to take part, with spectators also invited to make a £1 donation.

All monies raised on the night will go the mayor's three chosen charities for his year in office. They are Dudley CIL, The Friends of Alfie Johnson and the Dudley branch of Diabetes UK.

Walking football is, in essence, football without running. It was invented to inspire men over 50 to get more exercise and counter social isolation and has seen a massive upsurge in popularity, with more than 800 registered clubs by the end of last year.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif said: "Walking football has become massively popular in this country as an effective way of exercising while still enjoying playing the game we all love."

"I would urge people to sign up and support the event, and may the best team win."

To enter a team or for further details about the event, call or text 07703308463 or email Cllr.Mohammed.Hanif@dudleybc.gov.uk

Event to showcase anatomy at college

A UNIQUE live experience will offer pupils from across Walsall an in-depth understanding of the human anatomy and physiology.

Anatomy Lab LIVE is a popular touring anatomy event which showcases how the human body works through an interactive live event. The latest tour will stop at Walsall College on May 10 and 11 from 6-10pm.

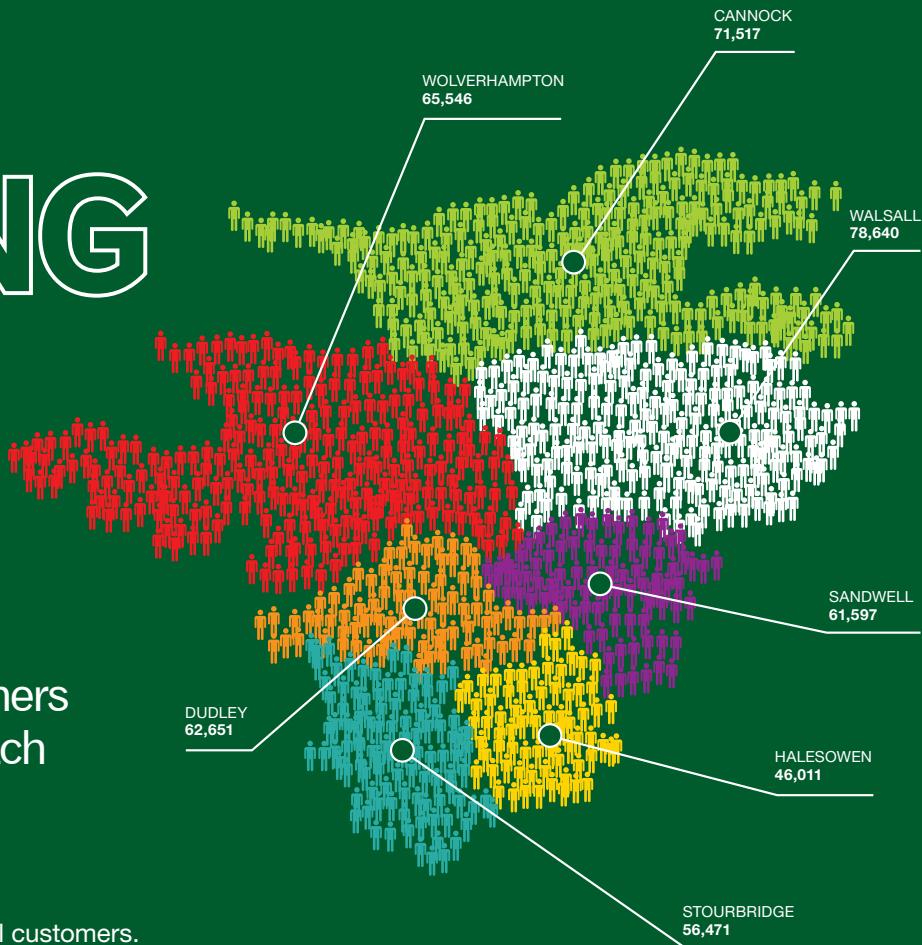
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A thank you from me will never be enough

AN AIR ambulance crew who saved a pregnant woman's life after she was stabbed 24 times have been presented with a Pride of Birmingham Award.

Midlands Air Ambulance Charity's critical care paramedics Steven Mitchell and Karen Baker, along with pilot Richard Steele accepted the award last week.

The trio flew out of RAF Cosford after receiving a 999 call to help Natalie Queiroz, from Sutton Coldfield, who was stabbed when she was eight months pregnant, leaving her with life threatening wounds, and major blood loss. The crew were nominated for the Pride of Birmingham Emergency Services Award for their 'heroism and incredible skill under extreme pressure'.

Natalie paid an emotional tribute to them on the evening, thanking

them for their quick work saving both her and her unborn baby.

She said: "My baby and I would not be here today if it was not for the Midlands Air Ambulance, and my other two daughters would not have their mum or little sister. Thank you will never be enough."

After receiving the initial 999 call, HeliMed03 from the RAF Cosford airbase was immediately despatched to the scene with a three-man crew.

Pilot Richard landed the helicopter safely on the High Street, as close to the patient as possible, and once mother and the unborn baby were stabilised at the scene, Natalie was in the air ambulance on her way to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

To find out more about the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity visit midlandsairambulance.com



Steven Mitchell, Natalie Queiroz from Sutton Coldfield and Richard Steele

Help find the driver who hit my teenage son

A MOTHER-OF-SEVEN has issued a plea for people to come forward with information after her teenage son was involved in a hit-and-run accident.

Matt Lucarelli, aged 17, had been walking his girlfriend to the bus stop when he was hit by the car outside his house in Powis Avenue, Tipton, on April 15. He was taken to Sandwell Hospital with a broken ankle and bruises, only regaining some of his memory about the incident now.

Distraught mother, Julie Lucarelli, aged 49, who is a full-time carer, said: "I had just been shopping with my daughter and was on the way back home and I thought 'oh my God' what's going on outside my house as there were ambulances there."

"Then my other son phoned me up screaming down the phone saying that Matt had been run over."

Concerning

"I ran across the road but I was too scared to go by him. It was awful." She added: "He had crossed his girlfriend over the road to catch the bus and he was on the way back home when it happened."

"We think he was knocked out because when he was in the ambulance they thought his injuries were a lot worse than what they turned out to be."

Matt, who has minor learning difficulties, is now recovering at home.

He is currently studying public services at college. Mrs Lucarelli is now calling for more information about the accident and is asking for the police to be more involved.

She added: "The car was pedestrian and a male had injuries to his ankle and elbow. We have had conversations with his parents and they phoned to update us with what had happened. An appointment was made for us to go and see Matt."



Matt with his mum Julie

to complain they thought Matt had been injured in a car instead of actually hit by one – it is confusing and concerning. The main thing now is that we catch the person who did it."

Julie continued: "It was a horrible experience. When I saw him he didn't even realise who I was. The whole situation and the way it has been handled has been shocking."

Phoned

The family now hope that they can find the driver and bring him to court.

A spokesman for West Midlands Police said: "We were alerted to the incident from West Midlands Ambulance Service at 2.50pm on April 15."

"It was a car versus pedestrian and a male had injuries to his ankle and elbow. We have had conversations with his parents and they phoned to update us with what had happened. An appointment was made for us to go and see Matt."

Payment system alert

PEOPLE living in Dudley borough have been warned the council's online payment system will be unavailable for a short period in May for an upgrade.

It means that all council online payment systems will be unavailable from 7.45pm on May 16 until 11.59pm on May 18.

For more information call 0300 555 2345.

New home for art exhibition

A DUDLEY trust has welcomed a new art exhibition. Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust is now home to Dudley Society of Artists.

Running until June 10, Canal-side features more than 50 diverse works by talented artists.

The society's former home was Castle High School and Visual Arts College, where the society meets weekly to work on their current projects, hold demonstrations and work on portraiture from live models.

For the past 89 years, Dudley Society of Artists has held its annual exhibition at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery. Following the closure of the Priory Street museum, Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust offered an alternative venue.

The exhibition is free to see at Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust's visitor centre, the Portal.

Holly Wain, the trust's heritage activities assistant, said: "We are thrilled to be able to champion the talent of local artists and promote the society and its work in our community."

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12 Historic Wolves cup winner's medal to go under hammer



The 1908 Wolves squad that won the FA cup, Billy Wooldridge is second row, fourth from left

A RARE piece of Wolves' history from the club's 1908 FA Cup final win is being sold at auction.

The 15 carat gold winner's medal was presented to Billy Wooldridge, the then Wolves' captain, following the 3-1 victory over Newcastle United.

More than a century later it is expected to fetch between £6,000 and £8,000 when it goes under the hammer next month.

The victory was the club's second in the FA Cup and came 46 years before Wolves were first crowned First Division champions. The medal is in a good condition and an engraving on the back features

MEMORY LANE

By Robert Cox

the skipper's name. It currently belongs to Shirley Burn, from Lichfield, who said she bought it from Wooldridge's grandson in 1979.

"My late husband and I had a shop in Birmingham and one day Billy Wooldridge's grandson came and said 'do you want it, I have decided to sell it,'" she explained.

"It was quite sad really. My late husband was a lifelong fan and he tried to talk the guy out of it. He told him it was such an important piece of history. But the man would not be convinced and we bought it off him." After Mrs Burn's late

husband died in 1994 she loaned it to Wolves and for 21 years it held pride of place in the club's museum. But now the 57-year-old has decided to sell the medal, which comes complete with its original box.

Billy Wooldridge was born in Netherton in 1878 and went on to make 356 appearances for Wolves, scoring 90 goals in 12 years at Molineux.

An entry in 'The Wolves' encyclopaedia published in 1989, reads: "Billy was a wonderful servant to Wolves – a player who was never flurried, never overawed, and one who never gave less than 100 per cent effort out on the park, whether performing in defence or attack. He played centre-half be-

tween Hunt and Bishop in the 1908 FA Cup Final, skippering Wolves to a memorable victory. With his thick black moustache, 'Woolly' was a commanding figure in the team."

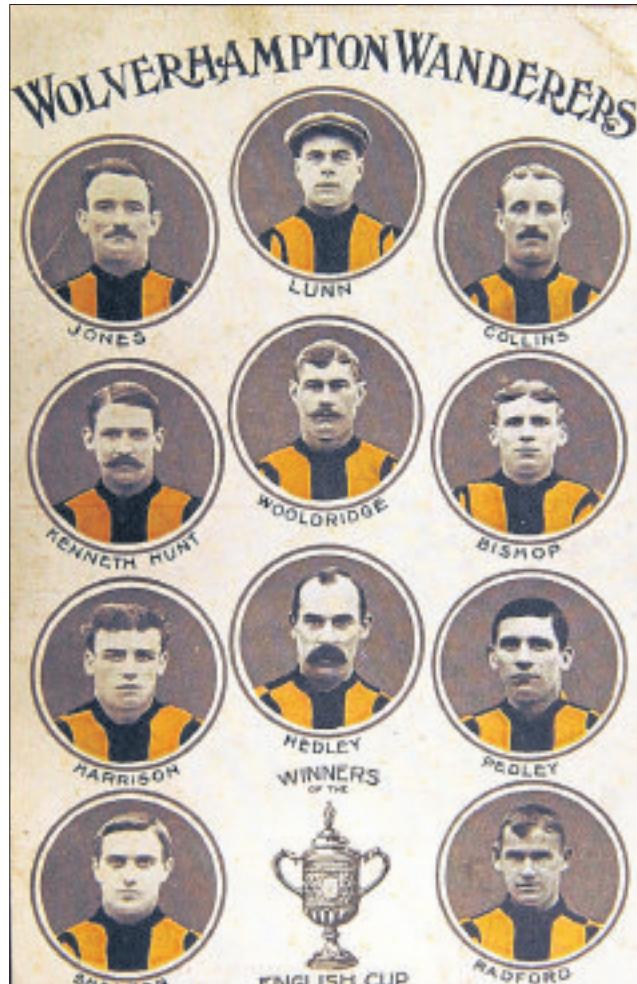
When Wolves won the FA Cup in 1908 there were only two divisions in English football, each with 20 teams. Cup favourites Newcastle finished fourth in the first division and Wolves finished ninth in division two.

The club had first lifted the trophy in 1893 and have won the competition on a total of four occasions with further success in 1949 and 1960.

Billy Wooldridge's winner's medal will go under the hammer through Graham Budd Auctions at Sotheby's in London on May 16. Mr Budd, said: "It is a very rare medal and hopefully it will make a good price."



The rear of Billy's 1908 FA Cup final medal



A postcard of the victorious 1908 Wolves team featuring captain Billy Wooldridge

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Bedroom antics and big laughs at centre



Dudley Little Theatre actors, from left, Deb Attwood, Flora Deeley, Phil Sheffield and Ray Curran in Bedroom Farce classic comedy. Mr Stamp said: "I have been a director elsewhere but was still a little worried about my directorial debut with the Little Theatre. However things have gone extremely well."

"The cast are very good and the play is extremely funny. It takes place in three bedrooms with couples who are either newly weds, middle aged or elderly. The main action is in the bedroom of the newly weds."

They will be performing Alan Ayckbourn's Bedroom Farce later this month at the Netherton Arts Centre, where they have been staging shows every year since 1947.

Tony Stamp, who has been with the troupe for ten years, is directing his fellow amateur thespians for the first time, as they finish rehearsals for the

it has been interesting learning of the stresses that can go with it."

Bedroom Farce will be running at the Netherton Arts Centre in Northfield Road from Wednesday, May 10, to Saturday, May 13.

The doors and bar open from 7pm and its curtain up at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £8 or £7 with concessions.

Tickets can be bought online through dudleylittletheatre.org, by phone on (01384) 872583 or on the door.

The group will next be in action in the play version of Willy Russell's Blood Brothers in late September.

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Staff Turn Superheroes for Charity



On Friday 5th May, Gymopobics Halesowen will be taking part in Free Radio's Cash for Kids Superheroes day with a 12 hour Classathon and invites you to join them!

It is open to ladies of any age or fitness ability and you can take part in as many classes as you like for a £1 donation towards the fund.

Owner Andrea Withers says 'As the

appeal fund goes to help local children we had no hesitation in agreeing to take part. Our members are really looking forward to it and it will be great to see some new faces coming to join in too. The staff will be dressed as Superheroes and you can just pop in and make a donation if you're not feeling energetic!'

If you would like to take part you can visit Gymophobics at 51 High Street, Halesowen. B63 3BG or call 0121 448 1743 for more information.

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Misprint on card is such folly

Kingswinford TG

KATH Turner provided flowers for the April 10 meeting at Kingswinford Community Centre, which she generously donated as an extra raffle prize.

Chairman Enid Fennell introduced newest member June Bradley. The necessary business was soon completed and the new committee member Pauline Bird was introduced as vice chairman.

The chairman introduced Roy Peacock as the speaker. Everyone was eagerly awaiting his address, described on the membership cards as 'The Local history of The Follies' and had been speculating on the precise nature of the talk.

Follies, as in Folies Bergere? Would we see our ancestors dancing The Can-Can? Would we be asked to try dancing it? Was it a case of local buildings erected to provide work for the local unemployed, or possibly weird and wonderful actions taken by locals who had had surprisingly odd results?

Rather sadly the reality was much simpler. The persons printing the cards have either auto correct or predictive texting on their computer and the word printed as follies should have been Foley's, which means a history of the Foley family and which proved interesting and very informative.

Mr Peacock was thanked by Joyce Major, Enid Fennell, Chris Moy and June Bradley won the raffle prizes. The next meeting is on May 8 and is about Female Conscriptation in the Second World War.

Small change adds up to charity cash

Entertaining talk from ex-Redcoat

Stourbridge Ladies

THIRTY-eight members and visitors of the Stourbridge Ladies Society met on March 28 to hear Mr Paul McGuire's talk entitled 'I was a Butlin's Redcoat'.

Mr McGuire took members back to the 1950s when he became an entertainer at the Penrhely holiday camp in Wales.

He was given two of the famous red blazers but had to buy the rest of the uniform, which was white and had to be pristine at all times.

His duties included meeting the trains, helping the holidaymakers settle in to their chalets, as well as being part of the entertainment team. He revealed that he had worked with many well-known comedians who were starting out on their careers. After leaving But-

lin's he worked for the BBC as a warm-up man at live televised performances.

Following his talk, Mr McGuire drew the raffle and he was thanked for giving such a lively and amusing talk.

Stourbridge Ladies Society has met in the church hall for the last 40 years, but are now moving to the Ambleside Room in Stourbridge Town Hall.

The meetings will continue to be on the fourth Tuesday of each month, starting at 2pm. All are welcome.

The group meets for interesting talks, outings and friendship.

For further information phone Mrs Hall on 01384 288841.

Grange (E) Guild

CHAIRMAN Chris Holton presided over the April meeting at Grange Court, Stourbridge.

She reported that a coffee morning was held on March 24 at the home of committee member Sue Wilding. Refreshments were on offer with tea/coffee and an abundance of home made cakes and 40/50 people attended. There was a bring and buy sale and a raffle and it raised £322 for Comic Relief. The whole event was voted a huge success and was enjoyed by all who attended.

The copper/ small change collection is still going well and another cheque for £50 has been sent to Lye and Wollescote disabled group. A cheque has also been sent to the Stroke Association, this year's chosen charity.

David Berry gave an entertaining and light-hearted talk on A Day in Court.

Refreshments were then served by committee members and their helpers with hot cross buns as an Easter treat. The sales table also had an Easter theme. Several ladies won raffle prizes.

Summer of rock for new season

The Festival Community Choir

THE Festival Community Choir celebrated the end of its second season by giving two sell-out concerts at The Beacon Centre for the Blind, Sedgley.

This 'sing for fun' choir sang a varied repertoire of songs from Sweet Charity, Chicago, Sister Act, Carly Simon and others. Choir members also donated cakes and scones for sale. Proceeds from the cake sale and ticket money came to just over £1,000 and were donated to The Macmillan Can-

cer Research Fund. All leftover cakes were donated to a Wolverhampton Homeless Centre. The choir's aim for next season is to take its membership up from 50 to 100.

The next season which begins on April 24 is Summer of Rock. The group practises at the Beacon Centre for the Blind on Mondays at 7.30pm. Contact www.festivalchoir.co.uk

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Cheers for kind-hearted youngsters



Pupils from St Francis Xavier School, Oldbury, celebrate winning an anti-bullying award from a national organisation

KIND-HEARTED pupils are celebrating after a Black Country school has been given an anti-bullying award.

St Francis Xavier Primary School, in Oldbury, has received the coveted 'BIG award' as part of a scheme created by the Bully Intervention Group.

It aims to help prevent bullying and general derogatory behaviour to children in schools.

Amelia Potter, nursery teacher at the McKean Road school, said: "The School is particularly good, bullying doesn't happen."

"It's a matter that is handled well

by children and staff." The primary school tackle bullying via a team of 10 pupils who are known as 'Buddies', who meet weekly to discuss how it can be prevented.

Buddies is led by St Francis Xavier teacher Kristina Benbow.

She said: "Bullying is a rare occasion at St. Francis Xavier and when it does happen it is dealt with properly to resolve any issues."

The Buddies group is a big part of our school.

"It ensures kids know why bullying happens, the effect it can have, and

how to help someone who is being bullied."

There are 10 pupils in Years 2 to 6 which are selected to be trained by staff at the school, they are chosen through an election run by children at the school.

These elected pupils are trained to help other children at the school and to involve anybody who may be subject to bullying. Val McFarlane, director at Bully Intervention Group, said:

"St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School work very hard to keep their pupils safe and happy."

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Combine the old and new for a classic look

ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips



SOME people still think that a 'period' home should be furnished with items appropriate to its history – and efforts to achieve this can be time-consuming and expensive!

And it's simply not true that homes only look 'right' if you do this, it's far better to combine old and new for a unique style.

This week I thought we'd take a look at vintage items that look great when matched with contemporary pieces.

Let's start with sitting room furniture and the classic leather Chesterfield. These lovely chairs and sofas have been much copied over the years but it is possible to pick up originals for reasonable prices in the sale room and they look great in any home.

Victorian and Edwardian chaises also look perfect in a modern setting and again won't break your auction budget.

They may need re-upholstering, if still in their original fabric and it is worn or stained, but this can be done by a professional as a reasonable price.

We auction a number of very nice vintage tables and chairs for both dining rooms and kitchens, Victorian and even Georgian sets sell for a lot less than you

would think and again any marks or cracks can be professionally repaired – and you can restore items yourself with a little expert advice.

Old bookcases don't cost the bidders too much, they look good in modern sitting rooms, offices and even hallways, and hatstands are invaluable in halls and bedrooms.

Many people buy lovely vintage desks for modern offices, thanks to flat-top screens and laptops they are now hugely popular, and even 1930s filing cabinets look 'right' in a contemporary business setting.

Look out for old wooden boxes and crates, they provide very attractive extra storage, and vintage lamps fit in with almost any room setting.

And the real advantage in buying vintage items for your home is that you will probably pay less for the antique items than you would for their modern counterparts!

* Perry and Phillips hold valuation days, for sale items only, every Wednesday from 10am. The next Perry and Phillips sale of antiques and collectables takes place at the Mill Street saleroom in Low Town, Bridgnorth, on Tuesday, June 6. Viewing will be during the weekend and on Monday and also from 10am on auction day.

• New sale bidders are advised to attend the sale room early on auction day to register and be allocated a bidding number.

* Perry and Phillips hold sales on the first Tuesday of every other month.

Craziest times yet for the clothing industry



Snap clothes up – before they go

I HAVE worked in the garment industry for well over 35 years and never has it been as crazy as it is at present.

The high-end designers and couturiers are now producing four ranges each year, planning for the next before the models even leave the catwalk in the latest creations. No time for them to sell enough of either "Haute Couture" or "Ready to Wear" collections.

As much as we may not believe this affects how we buy clothing on the high street it does in fact impact on what is on sale in our stores. Have you ever looked to buy a chunky jumper in March when the weather is cold or a bikini for an August vacation and found that the next seasons styles have already filled the stores?

January and July sales are a thing of the past and we now find at least four sales a year to get rid of the previous ranges. The savvy shopper is in their element, buying everything they need at reduced prices.

Consequently, the shops lose money selling less products at the full price and being left with unsaleable items.

If you see something you really like, don't

STYLE FOCUS

with Janet Timmis



spend too long thinking about it, be sure to buy it straight away.

This need to have something new on offer constantly not only affects the fashion industry but we also find our business clients wanting new style garments for their staff on a yearly basis, changing their corporate logos just as often.

The cost is ridiculous, particularly where workwear is required that must meet stringent safety requirements and therefore has to be tested at high cost before it can be issued to staff.

The inevitable mix of clothing diminishes the strength of the corporate identity.

Our wardrobes bulge with garments we don't wear, some still carrying the price tag, those bought in haste in the sales that seemed a fantastic bargain at the time but have never

been worn and those that will fit when we have lost a little weight.

The charity shops benefit selling the clothing we donate at higher prices. This week I saw a T-shirt in the window of one, it was £3, it is the same as one I purchased from Primark six months ago for £2.80!

This said, surprisingly, it has recently been reported that we no longer purchase a new winter coat each year, stores such as Debenhams and House of Fraser reducing the choice on offer.

Most of us have a car and drive almost door to door, school children rarely wear any protection over their school blazers even in the rain, our weekend casual walking jacket is always there in case of an emergency and global warming is supposed to be changing the weather.

Long gone is the "Sunday Best".

It is time to return to the two ranges of clothing a year, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter followed by end of season reductions.

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Mollie, pictured overlooking Edinburgh where she lives, has used her experience climbing Everest to inspire her in life. She's now preparing to tackle the mountain's north face

Everest climber Mollie is reaching new heights



Mollie conquered Everest at 21

MOST of us won't get anywhere close to summiting Everest, but that doesn't mean we can't borrow from the wisdom and insights of somebody who has.

At 21 – an age where most of us are navigating the rocky routes of job applications and trying to clamber out of the treacherous ravines of student overdrafts – Mollie Hughes became one of the youngest ever Brits to summit Mount Everest.

A keen climber, she'd written her university dissertation on the psychology of climbing Everest, the world's highest mountain (a staggering 8,848m), and then set her mind to conquering it herself, via the south side. Now, she's making a second attempt, this time from the north side. If successful, Devon-born Mollie, who's now 26 and lives in Edinburgh, will become the youngest Brit in history – as well as the youngest European woman and first English woman – to scale both the south and north sides of Everest.

After six weeks on the mountain, if all goes to plan, Mollie hopes to hit the summit on May 19 and return to base camp by May 22, to be home early June.

Mollie shares five things she's learned

Report by Abi Jackson

from conquering Everest that could apply in all aspects of life...

You don't have to start off confident to have self-belief. "Self-belief is a different thing to self-confidence. Self-belief is this deep-down feeling that you can do something and achieve something in your life – but it doesn't necessarily mean that you feel confident in different kinds of social settings, or whatever. I always had this deep-down belief that I could do something with my life, and over the years, with the expeditions I've been on, it's all increased my self-belief."

Stepping out of your everyday routine helps you appreciate things more. "When climbing Everest, you're away from home for two months. You're just focused on getting through the day; your climbing, making sure you're safe, well hydrated, eating enough, so you really have to take it back to basics. It makes you appreciate things when you get back to your normal routine."

Preparation and focus is key. "We've been preparing for this expedition for over two years. A lot of that has been raising the sponsorship and I've been training for over a year. None of it would be possible without doing all the groundwork first."

You have to really want something to make it happen. "I think the main thing [you need to summit Everest] is a really strong desire. On one of the first days on Everest back in 2012, one of the guides said to me, 'Climbing Everest is all about the extent to which you can suffer'. You're suffering every day, every hour, every minute for weeks on end – it's basically just two months of suffering!"

If you don't have that desire, that real deep-down need to get to the top, then all that suffering will take over and you'll give up. Last time, when I got towards the summit, all training went out the window and my body was screaming at me to stop. My mind had to be stronger than my body, to keep me moving forwards. In the end, it all comes down to that clarity, that perseverance."

But it's important to accept when things are out of your control.

"There have been other mountains that I've not been able to summit on. Sometimes other factors come into it that are out of your control. Knowing that I can achieve something is a good confidence boost, but on the mountain, you have to pay attention to other things going on around you too. When it is possible to do something, and it is just a mind thing, I always try to keep going."

Nurseries located in above the limit pollution hot-spots

Neighbourly 100th birthday celebration



Alice Smith celebrating her 100th birthday, pictured with former neighbour Chantal Bristow

FORTY years may separate the ages of French-born Chantal Rondepierre-Bristow and Alice Joan Smith – but that didn't stop them becoming best of friends.

Chantal, aged 60, from Sedgley, now even considers Joan, as she is known, to be her 'surrogate' mother to whom she can tell anything. And she has paid tribute to Joan as she recently celebrated her 100th birthday.

They first met in 1995 when they became neighbours while living at a flat in Moseley Village, Birmingham.

Chantal said: "From day one, when Joan met me in the corridor, she started to talk to me. I could say anything to her, could cry my heart out, or laugh until tears were running down my cheeks, she was there."

Joan celebrated her milestone birthday at The Firs Care Home, in Gospel End, Sedgley, on March 16. She was joined by Chantal, her husband Chris and staff members. Chantal added: "Joan was so delighted to receive the Queen's card. It is now sitting proudly in her private bedroom."

Death driver is warned to expect prison sentence

A MOTORIST from Wordsley is facing a lengthy prison sentence after admitting causing the death of a 66-year-old man by dangerous driving in Stourbridge.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Ryan Freeth had been on his mobile phone and speeding shortly before his car hit Leslie Marks in Amblecote High Street.

Mr Malcolm Morse, prosecuting, explained that two experts had different opinions about exactly how fast Freeth's Vauxhall Corsa was going when the fatal accident happened on November 29, 2015. He continued: "We are now in agreement that the dangerous driving

DOZENS of nurseries in the Black Country and Staffordshire are situated next to roads which have above-limit pollution levels, an investigation has found.

The West Midlands stands second in a list of the top 10 areas with the highest polluted roads in the UK.

Across the West Midlands, Birmingham is the highest affected area, with Sandwell and Wolverhampton behind. Greenpeace measured how many nurseries were within 150 metres of roads which breach the legal limit for NO₂ – nitrogen dioxide – the legal limit annually is 40mg.

Sandwell has 14 nurseries which are affected by pollution. The Branch nursery, Beeches Road, has the highest with 46.31 annual micrograms of NO₂ per cubic metre. The Little Wendy House, Walsall Street, Wonderland Children's Nursery, Holyhead Road and Wesley Playcentre at the Wesley Centre were closely behind with 46.13mg.

Report by George Kennedy

The Branch,Wesley Playcentre and Wonderland Children's Nursery were unable to comment. However, a spokeswoman for Little Wendy House said: "I'd say that it doesn't really affect us in that way. We're lucky where we are because even though we are close to the main road, the nursery itself is set back from the road. It's in a protected area in a way because you've got the buildings and trees that surround us."

Concerned

Other nurseries severely affected by pollution in the Black Country are Learning Journey's Daycare, Wolverton Road, Dudley, with 52.4mg and Stanley's Nursery, Birchills Street, Walsall, which was clocked at 47.34mg.

Stacey Hill, manager of Learning Journey's Daycare, said: "We are very concerned but it is down to the Government.

There's nothing we can physically do to prevent it, we can't shelter the kids and put a cell around them, can we?"

In Wolverhampton, Little Scholars Day Nursery, Randall Lines House recorded the highest at 44.06mg, with Little Oaks, Stafford Road and TLC Neighbourhood Nursery, Dunstall Road, with 43.93mg. A spokesperson for Little Oaks Nursery said: "We're quite far from the main road so it's not much of a problem."

Professor Chris Griffiths, of the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research, said: "The research is largely consistent across studies in the US, Europe, and also in London, that traffic fume exposure is associated with stunted lung development in young children."

Greenpeace want more to be done to create a car charging infrastructure. Diesel is responsible for 90 per cent of nitrogen oxide from roads with some diesel cars emitting 15 times more pollution than they should.

Escaped patient was in Spain

A 20-year-old from a Black Country residential care centre for people with mental health problems has pleaded guilty at Wolverhampton Crown Court to escaping from custody.

Jordan Goodwin, also known as Jordan Hagan, absconded from the Huntercombe Centre in Underhill Street, Langley on March 13, after being made the subject of an indefinite hospital order at Derby Crown Court in 2011.

A European Arrest Warrant was issued four days later and he was arrested in Spain soon afterwards. He was flown from Madrid to Birmingham on March 24 and arrested on landing.

The defendant pleaded guilty to escaping from custody when he appeared last week at Wolverhampton Crown Court via video from the prison where he is now being held.

Mr Simon Hanns, defending, said: "He believes he is somebody who should now be in society." He was remanded in custody for a psychiatric report.

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Bee helpful to buzzing friends in the garden

AS a new campaign is launched to urge gardeners to help bees – and people gear up for the Great British Bee Count – HANNAH STEPHENSON looks at ways to encourage our buzzing friends into the garden

I'M amazed at the numbers of bees I've seen on sunny days over the past couple of weeks, buzzing around the fragrant zingy yellow mahonia and purple heather in my garden.

It seems like a good omen for Bee Creative In The Garden! – a new campaign launched by the RHS in collaboration with the Wildlife Trusts to urge gardeners to help protect bees.

The campaign, which culminates in Wild About Gardens Week from Oct 23 to 29, featuring activities focused on how to help bees survive the winter ahead, comes as bees are under pressure due to loss of habitat.

In the countryside, 97 per cent of lowland meadow has already been lost and the dramatic decrease in suitable habitats isn't confined to rural areas. While the honeybee is an excellent pollinator, the charities are focusing on the equally valuable wild bees, including bumblebees and solitary bees.

Gardeners can download a wild bee-friendly gardening guide, and wildlife events and a "Bee Creative" photo competition are running to November 1 as part of the campaign.

Other charities are also joining the drive to help bees. Friends of the Earth is running The Great British Bee Count, now in its fourth year, from May 19 to June 30, which invites the public to download a free app to help identify bees and learn more about them.

The bee sightings will be mapped on greatbritishbee-count.co.uk and shared on the National Biodiversity Network, where researchers, experts and local authorities can access the data.

Ellie Brodie, senior policy manager of the Wildlife Trusts, says: "Anyone can take action to help wild bees whether you have a wall for vertical planting, window box, or back garden. It's easy to plant a bee haven and fun choosing between bee-friendly beauties such as borage, foxglove and honeysuckle."

The charities will be arming gardeners with the advice, insights and inspiration they need to create habitats that support wild bees as they emerge from their nests in early spring to forage for food.

So, what can we do?

BOOST YOUR BEE-FRIENDLY PLANT STOCK

Grow more flowers, shrubs and trees that provide nectar and pollen as food for bees and other pollinators throughout the year - pussy willow, primroses and crocuses in spring, lavenders, meadow cranesbill and ox-eye daisies in summer, ivy and hebes in autumn and mahonia and cyclamen in winter. As a general guide,

bees see purple and blue better than other colours and will use their senses to find other colours such as white apple blossom. Different bee species prefer different flower shapes, so aim for a range from tubular-shaped flowers like snapdragons and wallflowers, to open-headed flowers like larkspur and verbena.

LET IT GROW WILD

Leave patches of land to grow wild with plants like stinging nettles and dandelions to provide other food sources (such as leaves for caterpillars) and breeding places for butterflies and moths. Take simple actions to manage your existing land, green spaces and gardens to provide food sources and/or breeding places for pollinators.

CUT GRASS LESS OFTEN

Native flowering plants in grass areas, field corners, verges and specially sown flower-rich habitats support the greatest diversity of insect pollinators by providing nectar and pollen resources, places to nest or breed, and leaves for caterpillars.

DO NOT DISTURB

Avoid disturbing or destroying nesting or hibernating insects in places like grass margins, bare soil, hedgerows, trees, dead wood or walls. Pollinators need to nest in safety so that they and the next generation can survive winter, and start again the next spring.

PESTICIDES?

Try to avoid using them. Many people avoid chemicals and adopt methods like physically removing pests or using barriers to deter them. Try to encourage natural predators like beetles.

Register to take part in this year's Great British Bee Count at www.greatbritishbee-count.co.uk



Thyme can be grown in different areas of the garden

Thyme to enjoy tulips as they take daffodils' place

BEST OF THE BUNCH - Tulip

AS daffodils fade, so tulips are emerging in too many different colours to mention and in many different varieties, some with almost frilly flowers which mingle happily with orange, yellow and burgundy wallflowers; others which look better grouped as stand-alone specimens.

If you're looking for a more flamboyant variety, look to the Parrot tulips which have frilly, fringed petals in late spring. Good choices include the red and yellow T. "Flaming Parrot" or T. "Estella Rijnveld" which is red and white, while more subtle varieties include T. "Spring Green", a Viridiflora variety with single cream flowers with partly greenish petals, or "Queen of Night", a deep burgundy-black variety which looks great against a green backdrop mixed with acid-coloured wallflowers. Plant tulips in late autumn in well-drained, fertile soil in full sun. Some need to be lifted after they have flowered and stored until planting time comes around again, while others can remain in the ground to flower again the following year.

BEST OF THE BUNCH - Thyme

There are few herbs which provide as much

visual interest as thyme, partly because there are so many varieties which produce loads of tiny flowers in summer and masses of scent when you brush against them or run your fingers through them.

You don't just have to restrict thyme to your herb garden. Plant some pretty varieties to trail over your rockery and they should settle well in full sun. Try T. serpyllum "Annie Hall", a creeping, mound-forming plant with purple-pink flowers, or T. "Coccineus", with its crimson-pink flowers, over walls or in paving. Other good varieties include lemon-scented thyme T. x citriodorus, and T. vulgaris "Silver Posie". Thyme requires very little attention - water only in very dry conditions and feed sparingly.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- :: Sow fast-maturing and late-flowering annuals directly into their flowering position
- :: Move overwintered hardy annuals to their final flowering position
- :: Water and feed plants in the greenhouse regularly
- :: Feed seedlings and young plants which are growing poorly or have pale, yellowing foliage

It's never too young to start growing your own

Report by Lisa Salmon

KEEPING children occupied, and getting them to eat fruit and vegetables, can be really tough for parents.

But there's a simple way to successfully combine the two – by getting kids to plant seeds and grow and eat their own healthy produce.

Teaching children "food empathy" through sowing and growing means they'll have a better understanding of food and where it comes from, and that familiarity makes them much more likely to want to eat the food they've grown, says Michael Kelly, founder of the Grow It Yourself movement.

He says: "Getting children to grow their own food will help them to develop 'food empathy', which will follow them right through their lives.

"By growing some of their own food, they develop a better understanding of how food works, which is a proven lever to a healthier, happier life."

This year the Sow & Grow campaign, run by GIY and Innocent drinks, will teach more than 250,000 primary school children throughout the UK and Ireland how to grow their own food.

Appeal leaders will do this by sending free growing kits – including seeds, compost, growing cups and more – to their schools.

But sowing and growing is important at home too.

Kelly is keen to share some advice on how parents can get children to grow, eat and enjoy fruit and veg.

He suggests:

GROW IT

All you need is some soil or potting compost, seeds and a paper cup to get started.

"Kids will get a great buzz from seeing a little seedling emerge from the soil and having a real plant to mind," says Kelly.

"They're more likely to try vegetables like spinach and peas when they've grown them themselves."

Even the smallest food growing experiences have huge value in helping children to understand where their food comes from," he adds.

LET THEM CHOOSE

Kids are far more curious about food than we give them credit for, so get them to create a shopping list.

Then, take your child to the supermarket and let them see, smell and feel the fruit and vegetables with you.

VARIETY IS KEY

Immersing kids from a young age in trying lots of different foods will cultivate a diverse diet.

A child as young as two can help you to wash fruit and vegetables and in doing so, you can explore new colours and shapes together.

CHALLENGE

Encourage children to develop new skills in the kitchen by asking them to make a simple salad.

They can tear up broccoli or lettuce for a salad, scrub potatoes and cut soft foods



Encouraging children to grow their own vegetables from an early age can help them understand where food comes from, it is claimed



It's an age old problem – how to convince children to eat their greens

like strawberries and ripe tomatoes with a child-friendly knife.

BE CREATIVE

Work with your child to create food art – from watermelon flowers to animal-inspired snacks.

Even the pickiest of eaters won't be able to resist a plate full of colours.

EDUCATE

Each week, teach your child about a new fruit or vegetable – maybe one they've picked themselves at the supermarket – and work on a new recipe together.

TEXTURE v TASTE



Grow It Yourself founder Michael Kelly has tips for parents ready for dinner is a fun, mucky, hands-on activity.

For instance, you can create a mini-assemble line of food that needs mixing, rolling, washing etc.

DON'T GIVE UP

If you're finding it hard to get your child to eat fruit and veg, try and work it into other recipes.

For example, children will like chess; particularly if it's an egg salad, so let them be in charge of sprinkling it into the dish.

● For more on Grow It Yourself and Sow & Grow, visit giy.ie

Top quality and stunning

Commercial feature

OAKWOOD Lodge Park offers some spectacular views from its lodges nestled in the picturesque surroundings of mid-Wales.

From romantic breaks for couples to week-long holidays for all the family, self-catering lodges are available during winter, spring, summer or autumn, 365 days a year.

The quality self catering accommodation is in fully-equipped and centrally-heated log cabins. Guests can enjoy the small, peaceful and secluded park, set in 20 acres of land, including the bluebell filled woodland of about three acres.

Most lodges have private garden areas offering seclusion and privacy as well as the attractive panoramic view towards the magnificent Elan Valley, with its mountains, lakes and moors.

The park is just outside the market town of Rhayader and midway between the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia and Aberystwyth and Hereford.

Secure

Owner John said: "All lodges face south and have five-mile panoramic views across the valley. We are very dog friendly with secure fences right around the whole park. Most of our lodges have private hot tubs and we are open 365 days of the year."

"We offer romantic short breaks for couples, family holidays and welcome group bookings too."

"The quality of our lodges and the stunning views really are second to none," he added.

Our guests satisfaction comes first in everything we do. Many of our guests not only come back each year but many will visit several times a year."

Oakwood was first opened for guests in 1997 but was purchased by the current owners in April 2013. They spent the



Chill out on this relaxing site and with panoramic views

previous 11 years running a large and successful four-star bed and breakfast in Henley-on-Thames.

Since being at Oakwood, they have added three new premium lodges taking the total up to 14, 10 of which now have private hot tubs, which have proven particularly popular.

The owners, together with their live-in staff, have also re-surfaced the roads while a new guest reception was built and new signage erected on the lanes leading to the site. John added: "The objective was to

continue to offer a quiet, relaxing holiday, that was pet friendly and to welcome all guests whether they are a couple, family or group."

"Being open 365 days a year and allowing check ins on any day of the week, with only a three-night minimum stay, means that Oakwood has a dedicated following of regular guests who return time and again."

"The plans for the future include a couple more hot tubs, and perhaps one or two more lodges, but above all to retain the

quiet, friendly and relaxing atmosphere that Oakwood has built its reputation on," he added.

More details on the lodges at Oakwood Lodge Park can be found on the website at www.oakwoodlodges.co.uk or by calling 01597 811422.

Alternatively, contact Oakwood for details via email on info@oakwoodlodges.co.uk.

They are also on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OakwoodLodgePark where a host of pictures and videos of the park can be found.



Interior views of the high standard lodges

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Twin-centre trip that can meet all family needs

IT'S one of family travel's trickiest conundrums.

How do you please mum and dad as well as the tiny travellers? How to balance a need for sandcastles with a desire to trek around real castles?

The answer may well lie in two less familiar parts of that very familiar destination – the Costa del Sol, writes Victoria Politti.

We mixed a city break in Malaga with child-friendly sun and swimming in Estepona – and everyone was happy. We flew with Norwegian Air, which is rapidly expanding its flights from Manchester Airport. There was good legroom, discounts on child tickets and free WiFi on board with entertainment and children's programmes to watch on your own tablets and phones. It's clear why the company has won Europe's best low-cost airline for four years running.



Our first stop – the city of Malaga – is often overlooked as just an airport. But this is a child-friendly city – ours loved walking around the 1,000-year-old fortress palace Alcazaba and tasting tapas in Plaza de la Merced. There are gorgeous gardens, playgrounds a plenty plus a modern, renovated port area.

There are beaches too. On Playa San Andres you can get a well-priced paella and a dip in the sea – 10 minutes' walk from our hotel.

The Barcelo Málaga, next to the train station, is one of the most modern hotels around. Our suite was straight out of a designer's dream and bath time will never be the same again for our six and two-year-old after enjoying the jacuzzi in the bathroom.

They liked the slide almost as much. Not outside the hotel – this one is inside – taking guests from their tasty breakfast on the first floor down to reception to explore the city.

After two days, it was time to head 50 miles south for part two. A good tip if you need car seats – there's a company called Tots Store which provides proper modern seats and meets you in arrivals at Malaga Airport to get you kitted out.

Safely strapped in we head down the motorway. Next stop relaxation as we checked in at the Kempinski Hotel Bahia on the outskirts of Estepona. The town itself is more traditionally Spanish than the likes of Marbella and Torremolinos. Think packed plazas and tasty tapas at every turn.

The Kempinski is the area's premier hotel – and you can see why. It's worth a stay here for the pool alone. Or should I say pools, there are four after all.

The main children's one is perfect for small swimmers, winding its way under bridges and past trees so you can create your own adventures.

The beach in front of the hotel has enough sand to bury a dad up to his knees, enough stones to keep a two-year-old happy and the gentle waves of the Mediterranean inviting everyone in for a swim with views of Gibraltar on a clear day.

The hotel has four restaurants, a spa, gym and indoor pool. Rooms are spacious and luxurious with beautiful views. It's an upmarket hotel but caters for children well with a kids' corner at the breakfast buffet, mini dressing gowns and an ice cream bar along with a children's club at peak times.

After five days, two hotels, one city and one town, our last night was the same as our first – the four of us sharing a paella at a beachfront restaurant.

Even on a twin-stop balanced break there are some things equally popular with all of us.

• Norwegian Air (Fares from £29.90 at www.norwegian.com/uk) Accommodation: Barcelo Málaga hotel (www.barcelo.com) and Kempinski Hotel Bahia in Estepona (www.kempinski.com).



The new Furchester Hotel Live Show building



Presenters Chris and Pui with Freya Thursfield



Lots of fun at the launch event at the Furchester Hotel

Furry friends help to bring new show to life



CBeebies presenters Ben Cajee and Cat Sandion with Furchester characters Elmo and Phoebe outside the new Furchester Hotel Live Show at Alton Towers Resort

WE welcome you with furry arms!

The words echoed over the glorious sunny skies of Alton, Staffordshire.

Or to be more precise – Alton Towers Resort.

Britain's number one theme park has extended the popular CBeebies Land section of the park by adding two new attractions for 2017.

Youngsters can now meet the likes of Funella, Phoebe, Fergus, Isabel, Elmo and not forgetting Cookie Monster in the brand new Furchester Hotel show, which allows children and their grown-up counterparts to enjoy the escapades of their favourite furry monsters, before feathered singing superstar Chick Swagger performs his 'hit songs, encouraging excited onlookers to join in with the fun and frantic dance moves.

Also on offer is the Vroomster Go Jetters ride, where passengers can control the rotating spaceship and imagine battling the mischievous Grandmaster Glitch.

Myself, my wife and my five-year-old daughter have visited CBeebies Land previously, and so were thrilled when we were

HOLIDAYS

By Tim Thursfield

invited to try out the new attractions.

On arriving at the Alton Towers Hotel we were quickly escorted to our room by a very prompt and courteous porter.

The moon voyage bedroom in which we stayed was impressive and my daughter was most impressed when she realised that she had her own television and X Box console.

We then made our way to the Ubercorn Disco which was specifically designed for the youngsters, featuring regular visits from characters Elmo, Grandmaster Glitch and a fun DJ spot from Go Jetters' 'Ubercorn' himself. To add to that there was a large buffet on offer to all guests and games for all of the children.

I have to say that Alton Towers always seems to go the extra mile to impress their guests, and the welcome disco was no exception.

After a much-needed sleep in our futuristic space ship style bedroom (nano nano!), it was then time to rise for an early break-

fast. It was more a case of 'We welcome you with blurry eyes!' rather than the famous Furchester Hotel catchphrase as we searched for eggs, toast and a cuppa.

We soon forgot about the early start though when we spotted some of the famous faces seen regularly on the CBeebies channel.

My daughter was over the moon to be having a chat with the likes of Chris and Pui while munching on her toast. I know this means nothing to people who never watch children's television, but it's a big deal to young fans of CBeebies.

It was then time to frantically make our way to the launch parade where the stars of CBeebies and the likes of Danielle Lloyd, JB from JLS and other stars made their way to the new attractions at CBeebies Land.

After the spectacular launch event it was time to see what all the fuss was about.

As we made our way into the new Furchester Hotel live show every child battled for the front row before joining in with the fun provided by all of the favourite characters from the hit show. My daughter revelled in finding Cookie Monster's cookies and joining in with the dance move.

After the show it was time to experience the new Vroomster Zoom Ride.

Although the queue was quite long it was well worth the wait as youngsters launch from the jetpad and fly around various landmarks such as the leaning tower of Pizza and a Grandmaster Glitch style Statue of Liberty in the Vroomster.

It's a shame that CBeebies Land does not allow the use of fast track wristbands, but once on the rides they do not disappoint for youngsters.

The two new attractions are an excellent addition to the line-up of 12 other rides and attractions.

The last word should go to my five-year-old daughter who thought the whole day and the new attractions were simply 'awesome!'. Nothing else needs to be said.

• Alton Towers theme park tickets is from £27.50pp when booking online more than 5 days in advance. Overnight stays at the Resort are from £135 per room, B&B, based on a family of four sharing.

• The CBeebies Land Hotel, which opens in July is from £200, including B&B, based on a family of 4 sharing.

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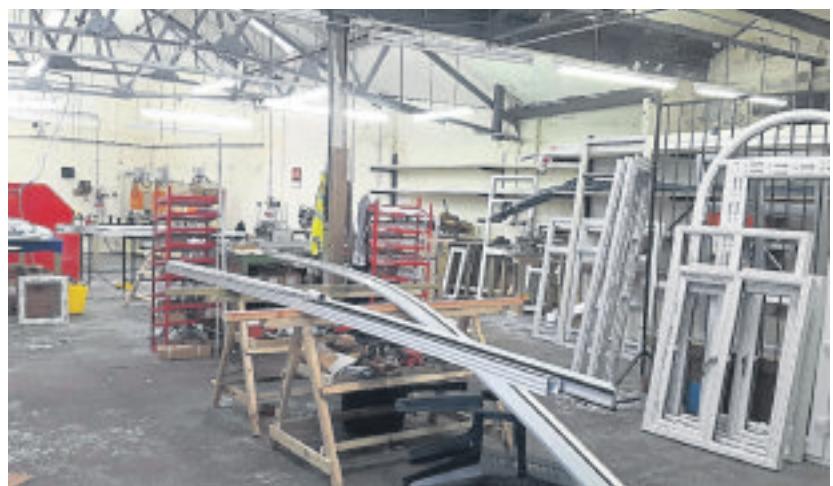
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Slowest annual rise in nearly four years

House prices recorded their slowest annual increase in nearly four years in April, Nationwide Building Society has reported.

The 2.6% year-on-year increase marked the weakest growth rate since June 2016 and took the average UK house price to £207,699.

House prices have dipped on a month-on-month basis for two months in a row, with a 0.4% fall in April following a 0.3% decrease in March.

Nationwide's chief economist, Robert Gardner, said that while monthly figures can be volatile, the recent softening in price growth may be a sign that households "are starting to react to the emerging squeeze on real incomes or to affordability pressures in key parts of the country".

He said: "It is too early to conclude whether the slowdown in house price growth is merely a blip, a reflection of the impact of the squeeze on household budgets, or is due to mounting affordability pressures in key areas of the country. Given the ongoing uncertainties around the UK's future trading arrangements and the upcoming election, the economic outlook is unusually uncertain, and housing market trends will depend crucially on developments in the wider economy."

He said that, in his view, household spending is likely to slow in the coming months, and this, combined with mounting affordability pressures, is likely to exert a drag on market activity and house price growth.

Mr Gardner continued: "However, the subdued level of building activity and the shortage of properties on the market are likely to provide support for prices. As a result, we continue to believe that a small increase in house prices of around 2% is likely over the course of 2017 as a whole."

He said there may also be more fundamental reasons for the slowdown – with house price growth having outstripped earnings growth for a sustained period of time, steadily eroding affordability.

For example, he said, the typical house price is currently 6.1 times average earnings, well above the long-term average of 4.3 times earnings, and close to an all-time high of 6.4 times recorded in 2007.

The last time house prices fell on a monthly basis for two months in a row was in July and August 2012, according to Nationwide's figures.

Howard Archer, an economist at IHS Markit, said: "April's second successive drop in house prices reported by the Nationwide provides compelling evidence the housing market is being increasingly affected by the increasing squeeze on consumers and their concerns over the outlook."

Jonathan Harris, director of mortgage broker Anderson Harris, said that, while mortgage rates have continued to fall, "lenders are tough on affordability and ensuring borrowers can afford their mortgage, both now and in the future should rates rise, so there is a limit on the amount of borrowing people can take on".

"If this means people are not able to pay more than a house is really worth, than that will have an impact on property prices," he added.

The mortgage price war is ramped up by Nationwide

The mortgage price war has been ramped up further as Britain's biggest building society has unveiled some of its lowest ever rates.

Nationwide Building Society said that it is snapping rates on selected two and five-year fixed and two-year tracker rate mortgage products by up to 0.1%.

Deposit

For those with a 10% deposit, often first-time buyers, Nationwide's two-year fixed rates have been reduced to 2.19% with a £999 fee and 2.59% with no fee, the lowest rates in this range ever offered by Nationwide.

A five-year fixed-rate product for borrowers with a 40% deposit will now start at 1.84% with a £999 fee and 2.04% with no fee – also a historic low for the society.

Historic

Henry Jordan, Nationwide's Director of Mortgages, said: "We are making further reductions to selected rates across our fixed and tracker rate ranges, with a number of Nationwide mortgage rates reaching historic lows."

Last week, Yorkshire Building Society launched a deal with the lowest rate experts had ever seen.

The two-year 0.89% standard variable rate (SVR) mortgage is available to borrowers with a 35% deposit. Financial information website Moneyfacts said the 0.89% mortgage rate is the lowest on its records, which go back to 1988.

Borrowers wanting to take out the 0.89% deal will also need to stump up a



product fee of £1,495, or alternatively they could opt to pay a lower fee of £995 and have a higher mortgage rate of 1.05%. Nationwide's announcement came as Santander made rate reductions of up to 0.3% on its mortgage products available

as well as launching some new deals on Wednesday.

Santander's revamped range includes a five-year fixed deal at 2.14% with a £999 product fee for borrowers with a 20%

deposit, with £250 cashback.

Miguel Sard, managing director of mortgages at Santander UK, said: "The mortgage market continues to be very competitive."

Number of new builds at the highest in a decade

The number of new-build homes being registered at the start of 2017 was the highest in a decade, according to an industry body.

Some 42,470 new homes were registered in the first quarter of 2017, showing the strongest quarter since the third quarter of 2007 as well as a 17% increase on the same period in 2016, according to the National House Building Council (NHBC).

Within the figure, there were 31,197 private sector registrations, marking a 10% increase compared with the same period in 2016.

There were also 11,273 affordable sector registrations, a 40% increase when compared with the same quarter in 2016.

Responsible

The NHBC's registration figures are taken from builders who are responsible for around 80% of homes constructed in the UK.

Builders are required to register a house with the NHBC, a warranty and insurance provider, before starting work, which means its figures represent homes to be built in the months ahead.

Across the financial year 2016/17, 157,898 new homes were registered, marking a 4% increase compared with the previous year, the NHBC said.

For the first time in seven years, all regions across the UK have experienced growth in registrations in the latest quarter compared with the same period 12 months ago, with the strongest increases being seen in the North East of England, which has seen a 39% uplift, London with a 38% jump and Eastern England with 31% growth.



The NHBC's managing director Neil Jefferson said: "These figures, with growth across the entire country, are clearly encouraging for the sector."

Mr Jefferson said there is an "air of positivity" within the industry, with mortgage lending figures and good rates of house sales adding to the upbeat outlook.

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All hard standing

I took Emma Hatton approximately 0.1 seconds to make a decision when she was asked to play the lead role in Evita. The actress and singer, best known for playing Elphaba in the West End production of Wicked, jumped at the chance to lead the line.

Having starred in major musicals, playing Donna in Dreamboats and Petticoats, she was thrilled to playing the lead in one of the greatest musicals of all.

Bill Kenwright's production of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd-Webber's Evita is on the road following its smash hit run at London's Dominion Theatre. It will reach Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre on Tuesday and play until May 13.

Telling the story of Eva Perón, wife of former Argentine dictator Juan Perón, Evita follows Eva's journey from humble beginnings through to extraordinary wealth, power and iconic status. She is ultimately heralded as the 'spiritual leader of the nation' by the Argentine people.

Starring two of musical theatre's most outstanding leading performers; Emma and Gian Marco Schiaretti, who is embarking on his first UK tour having played the title role in Disney's production of Tarzan, audiences can anticipate a five-star performance.

Evita has more than 20 major awards to its credit and the Oscar-winning film version starred Madonna and Antonio Banderas. It features some of the most iconic songs in musical theatre, including Don't Cry For Me Argentina, On This Night of a Thousand Stars, You Must Love Me, and Another Suitcase in Another Hall.

Emma has enjoyed picking up

the baton and enjoys every performance. It's one of the most iconic roles in musical theatre. It didn't take me very long to say yes to that. I've never done anything like this before.

"I'd never seen a production of it but had watched the film many years ago. It was nice to come into the project. I knew the bare bones of it and had a grasp of what it was about. I've had the opportunity to learn so much about her story and the Argentinian history but I wasn't familiar with a lot of it before."

That knowledge gap proved advantageous to Emma, who was able to originate her character from scratch – rather than trying to imitate another actress's performance.

"Because I haven't seen any of the productions, I don't have anything else to go on. I'm stepping into quite big shoes with the people who have played it before. But it would be detrimental to think too much about what they've done. I don't want to be caught up on others, I'd lose my confidence slightly. By approaching it myself, it's completely my own take."

FICTIONAL

Emma has led a varied career, playing in Dreamboats, We Will Rock You, Wicked and more. Her roles in Wicked and We Will Rock You won her a slew of Award nominations. But she's enjoyed getting her teeth into a real character, rather than a fictional one.

"I think it's a very well known show that was very well written and is well loved. To portray a real life character is a privilege and something to be respected. And both vocally and in terms of acting, it's been a massive challenge. I took the role as much to see whether I could do it or not. I like a challenge. It's something very different to what I've done before. From a performing perspective, it's important for people to see I'm versatile. Hopefully that will lead to a longer career."

I took the role to see whether I could do it or not... I like a challenge

The responses from theatre audiences up and down the country has been ecstatic. Emma's been revelling in the joy that her characterisation has bought. "I didn't realise how loved this show was."

"The audiences have been very full houses and seem to really love the show. You feel that warmth from the show. Long may that last."

And yet Emma will be keen to do something different at the end of Evita's present run. While she lives and breathes every moment, she's tied to the diversity that's present in her career and relishes taking on different roles.

"I was the original cast for Dreamboats. I got to work with the writers and worked closely with them on the characterisation and the script. The music of that era was so gorgeous and then moving on to do We Will Rock You, then Wicked, gave me the opportunity to do something different. I enjoy that."

"I think there's a difference between being in the West End and being on the road. The routine is very different and the discipline has to be a lot stronger on tour because of the travelling and what it takes out of your body. To be on the road, you're living out of a suitcase and are away from your family. You need more strength of character. You're away from loved ones and your own bed. But you get to go to your beautiful cities and see beautiful theatres. And every part of the UK and Europe has a very different vibe."

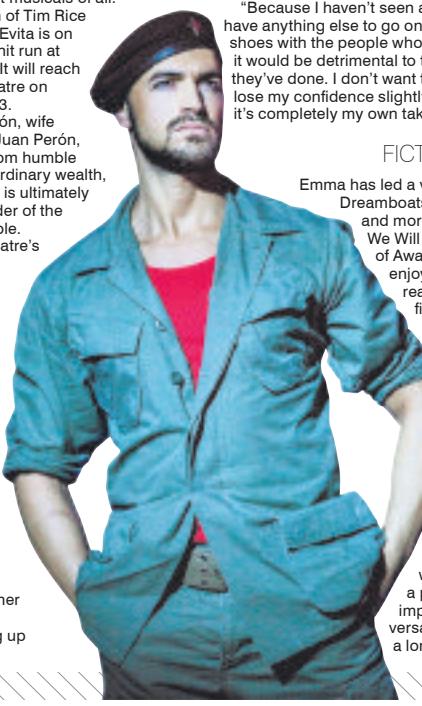
"I hadn't toured for a while so I was ready to get on the road and show the UK what we're about."

Another suitcase another hall. Emma's role in Evita is the classic case of life imitating art.

For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.



Don't cry for me, Wolverhampton



The all-inclusive Tommy cast



Rock on, Tommy as musical makes return

The Who's epic, award-winning musical, *Tommy* rocks into Birmingham Repertory Theatre later this month.

Directed by Kerry Michael, it features two new songs written exclusively for the new tour by The Who's guitarist and lyricist Pete Townshend.

Based on the iconic 1969 rock concept album, *Tommy* is the tale of the pinball-playing boy, an exhilarating story of hope, healing, and the human spirit which has entertained for more than 40 years.

The cast of 22 includes Peter Straker as the Acid Queen, alongside an inclusive cast of deaf and disabled and non-disabled actors.

The production will feature a new version of Amazing Journey to open the show and a brand new song, Acid Queen 2 for Act Two alongside classics *Tommy Can You Hear Me, I'm Free, See Me Feel Me*

and Pinball Wizard. The production follows young Tommy after he witnesses the murder of his father by his mother's lover. Traumatised, he chooses to stop communicating with the outside world as he grows up in post-Second World War England, where he suffers abuse from relatives and others in the wider community. But as an adolescent, Tommy's life begins to change when he finds salvation in playing pinball.

In this new staging every performance features a creative use of audio description, captioning and British Sign Language interpretation.

Tommy plays at Birmingham Repertory Theatre from May 17 to 27 with show times at 7.30pm Monday to Saturday and matinees at 2pm on Thursday and Saturday. Tickets start from £15. Book online at birmingham-rep.co.uk or via the box office on 0121 236 4455.



Richardson the daddy of comics

With a two-month old daughter, stand-up comic Jon Richardson admits that life at home is very chaotic at the minute.

So the proud new father believes this is the perfect time to be going on tour. "Gigs have become very cathartic for me, as things are so hectic at home," he said.

For him, being on stage is now the equivalent of going to the pub or the cinema.

"Our baby is only two months old, so it's obviously the perfect time for me to be leaving home for several weeks," said the funnyman.

"It has to be said, I'm not terribly popular at home. But I'm assuming that by the time I get back home, my daughter will be toilet-trained, capable of dressing herself and

able to drive." Richardson's new show, *Old Man* – a follow up to *Funny Magnet* and *Nidiot* – is packed with reflections on the trials and tribulations of new fatherhood.

He even discloses some of the more bizarre incidents that have occurred since the new arrival.

One of Jon's main worries is that his daughter will grow up resembling him. "What I'm dreading is raising her to be like me," he says. "If I hear her saying, 'I can't eat that chip because it's touched those baked beans', I'll know she got too much of me in her!"

He adds: "I'm determined not to talk about my baby in a way that's alienating.

But it's been such a big change in my life that I can't not talk about

it. It's also nice to have something new to stress about."

The comedian, who has starred on such TV shows as 8 out of 10 Cats Does Countdown, Have I Got News For You, Live At The Apollo, Channel 4's Comedy Gala Live At The O2 and more recently Taskmaster on Dave has been attracting a host of critical plaudits and performs at Birmingham's Hippodrome tonight (Thursday).

But, much as he loves touring, Richardson reveals: "I'll have a break over the summer. People would rather be out in the sun than inside listening to a whingeing moron!"

For tickets, call 0844 338 5000 or visit www.birminghamhippodrome.com

Adam ready to Stand And Deliver

New Romantic 1980s heartthrob is back in the leather jacket and ready to Stand And Deliver at the Symphony Hall, Birmingham, with back-to-back gigs on May 12 and 13.

The King of the Wild Frontier will be performing the hits, such as *Ant Music* and *Prince Charming* on his Anthems: The Singles Tour, and also promises a few lesser known tracks for the hardcore fans and some of his personal favourites.



Give your Verdict on courtroom drama

Former Casualty star Clive Mantle and Jack Shepherd of Wycliffe fame star in courtroom thriller *The Verdict* at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre this week.

Made famous by the Oscar-nominated Sidney Lumet film starring Paul Newman, Charlotte Rampling and James Mason, it opened on Tuesday and runs until Saturday. Book on 01902 429212 or at www.grandtheatre.co.uk

Elsewhere, comedians Omid Djalili and Micky Flanagan perform in Birmingham. Djalili is at the Symphony Hall tomorrow night (Friday), with Flanagan at the Barclaycard Arena from May 18 to 20. Also in the Second City, the Robert Cray Band performs on Sunday night, Procul Harum are at the Town Hall on May 11 and Adam Ant at the Symphony Hall on May 12 and 13.

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CHOICE**Peter Capaldi****Doctor Who
(BBC1, 7.20pm)**

Bill and some of her friends decide to move in together, and find what seems to be the perfect house. However, the absurdly cheap rent, and a decidedly creepy landlord (played by guest star David Suchet) suggest that domestic bliss might not yet be on the cards. The Doctor believes something is seriously wrong with his assistant's new home, plagued as it is with strange drafts and oddly creaky floorboards, and that's without considering the ominous tower found at the very heart of the building – one that doesn't seem to have an entrance. Peter Capaldi and Pearl Mackie star, with Matt Lucas.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00 Saturday Kitchen** Live. **11.30** Mary Berry's Absolute Favourites. **(R) 12.00** Football Focus. **1.00 BBC News:** Weather. **1.15** Usain Bolt: The Final Chapter. **1.45** Athletics; Diamond League Qatar Highlights. **2.45** Bargain Hunt. **(R) 3.45** Escape to the Country. **(R) 4.30** Final Score. **5.30** Who Dares Wins. **6.10** News. **6.20** Regional Programme. **6.30 Pointless Celebrities:** Richard Park, David Grant, Ben Forster, Danielle Hope, Patti Boulaye, Nina Myskow, Jamie Raven, and Ashleigh and Pudsey take part in a talent-show themed edition of the quiz. **7.20 Doctor Who.** Bill moves into a new house with her friends, complete with creaking floorboards, a creepy landlord, and a strangely inaccessible tower at its heart. Guest starring David Suchet. **8.05 Casualty.** Louise confronts Jez about his infidelity, but when he comes clean from his secret squeeze, Mickey, she is left stunned. A revelation about the events of the previous week leaves Ethan reeling, and Charlie makes it is personal mission to restore the spirits of everyone in the ED. **9.00 Michael McIntyre: Happy & Glorious.** A chance to see a show from the popular stand-up star's 2015 tour of the UK and Ireland, recorded as-live at the O2 in London. Returning to a venue he has visited 27 times in the past, more than any other artist in the world, Michael showcases his particular brand of wit, taking aim once again at some of the absurdities of everyday life. **10.00 BBC News:** Weather. National Lottery Update. **10.20 Match of the Day.** Gary Lineker presents highlights of the latest Premier League matches, including Swansea City v Everton at the Liberty Stadium and Hull City v Sunderland at the KCOM Stadium. **11.40 Murder in Successville.** A radioactive monster seems to be on the loose in Successville, and Di Sleet enlists the aid of new assistant Lorraine Kelly to get to the bottom of the mystery. **12.10 Film:** Flatliners. (1990) **2.00** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.05 BBC News.**

BBC2

6.25 Film: That's Entertainment! III. (1994) **8.20** Talking Pictures: Musicals. **(R) 9.05 Film:** Silk Stockings. (1957) **11.00** Monty Halls' Great Hebridean Escape. **(R) 12.00** Great British Menu. **(H) 12.30** Great British Menu. **(R) 1.00** Great British Menu. **(R) 1.30** Film: 4 for Texas. (1963) Conquest. **2.00** Trust Me, I'm a Vet. **(R) 4.20** Flug It! **(R) 4.55** Gardeners' World. **(R) 5.25** Springwatch in Japan. Cherry Blossom Time. **(R) 6.25** Jenan's Northern Wilderness. Part one of two. Naturalist Steve Backshall and two-time Olympic gold medal-winning rower Helen Glover explore the landscapes and culture of northern Japan. **7.20 Trump on Culture: Brave New World?** Alastair Sooke visits the US to investigate what impact President Donald Trump's plans to scrap federal funding for the arts might have on the nation's cultural landscape. **8.00 Grand Tours of Scotland.** Paul Murton explores the rise of the seaside as a popular tourist destination, travelling from St Andrews via the Firth of Forth to North Berwick and Edinburgh. Last in the series. **8.30 Dad's Army.** The men of the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard platoon take charge when a large naval gun is delivered to the church hall. Classic comedy, starring Arthur Lowe and John Le Mesurier. **(R) 9.00 Film: Nightcrawler.** (2014) Première. A cynical petty crook is inspired when he sees a freelance camera crew, and decides to go into business filming crime scenes and accidents, then selling the footage to news broadcasters. His determination to stay ahead of the competition leads him down a dark path as his methods become increasingly ruthless. Crime drama, starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Rene Russo and Bill Paxton. **10.50 QI XL.** Jimmy Carr, Aisling Bea and Danni Bhoy compete alongside resident scientist Alan Davies, as question master Stephen Fry muddles through the middle show of the middle series. **11.35 Versailles;** **(R)** Inside Versailles. **12.35 Film:** The Big Kahuna. (1999) **2.00** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Bottom Knocker Street. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. **(R) 6.35** Sooty Stories: Share a Story. **(R) 6.40** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. **(R) 6.50** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. **(H) 7.00** Quirky Words. **(R) 7.30** Thunderbirds Are Go. **(R) 7.55** NinjaGo: Masters of Spinjitzu. **(R) 8.25** ITV News. **8.30 Weekend:** **9.25** ITV Racing: The Opening Show. **10.20** Judge Rinder. **(R) 11.20** Tipping Point. **(R) 12.20** ITV News: Weather. **12.25** Big Bheads. **(R) 1.30** ITV Racing: Live from Newmarket. Coverage of today's race meetings at Newmarket and Goodwood. **4.00** Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs. **(R) 4.30** Catchphrase. **(R) 5.15** Britain's Got More Talent. **6.15** Regional Programme; Weather. **6.25** ITV News: Weather. **6.45 Take Me Out.** A firefighter, a barber, a test driver and a gym instructor enter the "love lift" in the hope of impressing 30 single women and winning a date – but they must first get the female participants to keep their lights on as a sign of approval. **8.00 Britain's Got Talent.** Another selection of would-be stars are given a chance to demonstrate their unique talents, as the fourth round of auditions gets under way. As always, Simon Cowell, Amanda Holden, David Walliams and Alesha Dixon will beckon each act into the spotlight, where they must show off their skills to the best of their ability if they are to secure the panel's attention and win a place in the next round of the contest. However, for those performers whose skills capture the hearts of either the judges, or Ant and Dec, a simple tap of the golden buzzer could see them progress straight through to the live shows. **9.15 The Keith and Paddy Picture Show.** New series. Keith Lemon and Paddy McGuinness remake Hollywood movies, and begin by casting Jessica Hynes, Larry Lamb, John Barrowman and Kimberly Wyatt in Dirty Dancing. **9.45 Film:** The 40 Year-Old Virgin. (2005) Comedy, starring Steve Carell and Catherine Keener. **10.45 ITV News:** Weather. **11.05 Film:** The 40 Year-Old Virgin. (2005) Continued. **12.15 Jackpot247.** **3.00** Who's Doing the Dishes? **(R) 3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 Mobil 1 The Grid. **6.40 Motor Sport:** British GT. **7.10** The King of Queens. **(R) 7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. **(R) 8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. **8.25 Frasier.** **(R) 8.55** Frasier. **(R) 9.25** The Big Bang Theory. **(R) 9.55** The Big Bang Theory. **(R) 10.25** The Simpsons. **(R) 11.30** The Simpsons. **(R) 12.00** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. **(R) 12.55** Come Dine with Me. **(R) 1.55** Come Dine with Me. **(R) 2.30** Come Dine with Me. **(R) 3.00** Come Dine with Me. **(R) 3.35** A Place in the Sun: Summer Sun. **(R) 4.35** Big House, Little House. **5.35** Location, Location, Location. **(R) 6.30** Channel 4 News. **7.00 The Restoration Man.** George Clarke revisits Dave and Margaret Hedley for a second time, hoping to see what progress has been made on their ambitious plan to restore a derelict 17th-century water mill in Northumberland. After eight years toiling away at the project, Dave and Margaret have seen off historic levels of flooding and a devastating illness, and have hand-built a working replica of the mill's old water wheel. In the threshing barn, the pair's impeccable restoration work is on full display, and George discovers how the water wheel is about to take on a new purpose for the 21st century. **8.00 Walking Through Time.** Historian Dr Tony Horridge and Professor Adrian Lister visit Shropshire to discuss analysis into the remains of five mammoths found in a quarry in 1986. **(R) 9.00 Film:** The Faul in Our Stars. (2014) Première. Indianapolis teenager Hazel has terminal thyroid cancer and attends a patients' support group, where she meets fellow teen Gus, who lost a leg to the disease. The two fall in love and a shared passion for books leads them on a literary pilgrimage to Amsterdam in search of reclusive author Peter van Houten. Romantic drama based on the bestselling novel by John Green, starring Shailene Woodley, Ansel Elgort, Laura Dern and Willem Dafoe. **11.35 Film:** Ghost. (1990) Romantic fantasy, starring Demi Moore. **1.45 The 80s:** Ten Years That Changed Britain. **(R) 3.05** Hollyoaks. **(R) 5.05** Jamie's Comfort Food. **(R) 12.15 SuperCasino.** **3.10** Film: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. (2009)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.00** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. **(R) 10.35** Access. **(R) 10.40** Caught on Camera. **(R) 11.00** Police Interceptors. **(R) 12.00** On Benefits: The Bargain Queen. **(R) 1.00** Benji. **2.00** Benefits: Cash-Strapped Couples. **(R) 3.00** The Nightmare Neighbour Next Door. **(R) 4.00** The Nightmare Neighbour Next Door. **(R) 5.00** Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. **(R) 6.00** Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. The agents chase £4,500 owed to a shipping company by a car parts dealer in Lancashire, and in east London, the officers try to collect over £2,000 owed to a housing association. **(R) 6.55** 5 News Weekend. **7.00 NCIS:** Los Angeles. The FBI's domestic terrorist task force steps in to help the team when a former marine is suspected of creating a chemical bomb. **7.45 NCIS:** A US Navy Public Affairs Officer is killed, and when the team takes up the case, both the man's wife and his mistress emerge as potential suspects. Each woman offering a very different take on the chain of events that led to the murder, and the investigators are forced to decide which of the two is telling the truth. Meanwhile, DiNozzo's father comes to the aid of a homeless woman, who makes a surprising claim about his relationship with her. Guest starring Robert Wagner. **8.45 Film:** Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves. (1991) An English nobleman returns home from the crusades to find his father has been killed and his local people are oppressed by the tyrannical rule of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Branded an outlaw, he recruits a group of bandits to fight for justice and protect the downtrodden. Action adventure, starring Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman and Morgan Freeman. Edited for violence and language. Includes a 5 News Update at 9.45pm. **11.45 Football on 5: Goal Rush.** Action from the final fixtures of the regular season in League Two, including Luton Town v Morecambe, Hartlepool United v Doncaster Rovers, and Newport County v Notts County. **12.15 SuperCasino.** **3.10** Film: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. (2009) **1.00** Close

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Dan Cruickshank: At Home with the British **8.00** The BBC at War **9.00** Hinterland **10.30** Top of the Pops: 1983 **11.45** Genesis: Together & Apart **1.20** TOTP2: Genesis **2.05** Prog at the BBC **3.05** Sounds of the Eighties **3.30** Close **ITV2**

11.00 Britain's Got Talent **12.25** Britain's Got More Talent **1.25** Take Me Out **2.40** Take Me Out – The Gossip **3.40** You've Been Framed **4.10** Film: Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang **(2010) 5.10** FYI Daily **5.15** Film: Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang **(2010) 7.25** FYI Daily **8.15** Paul Blart: Mall Cop **(2009) 9.25** FYI Daily **10.15** Film: Paul Blart: Mall Cop **(2009) 11.20** Family Guy **12.50** Film: Delivery Man **(2013) 1.55** FYI Daily **2.00** Film: Delivery Man **(2013) 2.45** The Hot Desk: The Vamps **2.55** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen **ITV3**

12.50 Wycliffe **1.55** Lewis **5.55** Rosemary & Thyme **7.00** Midsummer Murders **8.00** Foyle's War **11.00** Law & Order: UK **2.00** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping **ITV4**

11.00 British Superbike Championship Highlights **12.05** Road Racing Series **1.10** Film: Superman (1978) **2.10** FYI Daily **2.15** Film: Superman (1978) **4.05** The Dark Knight **5.05** Storage Wars **7.05** The Sweet **8.05** Better Late Than Never **9.00** Film: Lethal Weapon 4 (1998) **10.05** FYI Daily **10.10** Film: Lethal Weapon 4 (1998) **11.30** Film: American Gangster (2007) **12.30** FYI Daily **12.35** Film: American Gangster (2007) **2.35** The Car Chasers **3.00** Teleshopping **Film4**

11.00 The Goldbergs **12.30** Film: Astro Boy (2009) **2.15** Film: The Net (1995) **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Film: Hanna (2011) **11.10** Gogglebox **1.20** Rude Tube **2.25** Tattoo Fixers **3.20** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **4.05** How I Met Your Mother **4.45** Black-ish **5.05** Film4 **1.00** The Rugrats Movie (1999) **1.00** Dr Seuss' The Lorax (2012) **2.40** Short Circuit (1986) **4.40** A Thousand Words (2012) **6.35** Mrs Doubtfire (1993) **9.00** Aliens (1986) **8.05** Sci-Fi Thriller sequel, starring Sigourney Weaver. **12.05** The Woman in Black: Angel of Death (2014) Horror sequel, starring Helen McCrory and Jeremy Irvine. **2.00** American Mary (2012) **4.00** Close

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SUNDAY'S TV MAY 7

CHOICE



Samantha Spiro

Babs (BBC1, 8pm)

Biopic of Barbara Windsor, following the key events of her life over the course of 50 years. The story begins in 1993, with the actress preparing for a stage performance, before flashing back to her childhood as a lonely evacuee in the Second World War, her rise to fame in the Carry On films and her difficult relationships with her father and her first husband, gangster Ronnie Knight. Samantha Spiro, Jaime Winstone and Windsor herself share the lead role.

BBC1

- 6.00 Breakfast. **7.40 Match of the Day.** (R) 9.00 The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00 The Big Questions.** **11.00 Regional Programme.** **12.15 Bargain Hunt.** (R) 1.00 BBC News. **1.15 Homes Under the Hammer.** **2.15 Saturday Morning.** (R) 3.00 Escape to the Country. **4.00 Points of View.** **4.15 Songs of Praise.** **4.50 Pointless Celebrities.** (R) 5.35 BBC News. **5.50 Regional Programme.**
- 6.00 Countryfile.** The latest agricultural news, including reports on issues affecting country communities and insights into the life of the rural families.
- 7.00 Antiques Roadshow.** Fiona Bruce presents the show from Ightham Mote, a medieval manor near Sevenoaks. Objects brought in to be valued include a gold ring containing a lock of Lord Byron's hair, a pair of Chinese paintings and a collection of postcards from 1916 that reveal the story of how a British POW sent secret messages back to his family.
- 8.00 Babs.** Biopic of Barbara Windsor, following her life between 1943 and 1993, including her evacuation in the Second World War, her rise to fame and her marriage to gangster Ronnie Knight.
- 9.30 Mrs Brown's Boys.** Agnes tries to make friends with Dermot's mother-in-law Hilary ahead of the baby's birth, and suggests they go out to dinner together. However, the evening comes to an abrupt end for the two feuding matriarchs when expectant mum Maria goes into labour, and the Browns are forced to rush her to hospital. Comedy, written by and starring Brendan O'Carroll. (R)
- 10.00 BBC News.**
- 10.20 Regional Programme.**
- 10.30 Match of the Day 2.** Mark Chapman reviews the latest Premier League action, featuring Liverpool v Southampton at Anfield and Arsenal v Manchester United at the Emirates Stadium. The Saints are set for a mid-table finish, but the other three teams involved needed three points to boost their chances of finishing in the top four.
- 11.40 The Women's Football Show.** Tina Daheley and guests reflect on the weekend's FA Women's Super League Spring Series action.
- 12.15 Weather for the Week Ahead.**
- 12.20 BBC News.

BBC2

- 6.15 A to Z of TV Gardening.** (R) 7.00 The Instant Gardener. (R) **7.45 Beechgrove Garden.** **8.45 Countryfile.** (R) **9.45 Saturday Kitchen Best Bites.** **11.15 Saturday Kitchen.** (R) **11.45 Great British Menu.** (R) **12.15 MOTD Extra.** **1.00 Rugby Highlights.** 2.00 Equestrian: Badminton Horse Trials. Live coverage of the three-day eventing competition. **4.00 Rowing World Cup.** Live coverage of the opening meeting of the season from Belgrave. **5.30 Flog It!** (R) **5.55 Film:** The Terminal. (2004) Comedy, starring Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones.
- 8.00 Mexico: Earth's Festival of Life.** New series. The first of three programmes about the wildlife, landscape and culture in different areas of the country explores the Sierra Madre mountains, and reveals how this rugged landscape has shaped the nation. This chain of peaks includes several volcanoes and is home to a wide variety of animals, including black bears, monarch butterflies, orchid bees and quetzals. The programme also visits the ruins of an ancient Aztec shrine and the blue agave plant which grows in the mountains is used in making tequila.
- 9.00 Dara and Ed's Road to Mandalay.** New series. Dara O Briain and Ed Baines travel South East Asia, travelling more than 3,000 miles from Malaysia to Myanmar as they forge their way to the historic city of Mandalay. The comedians begin their journey in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, where they watch a beauty pageant for chickens and join a mass cycle ride through the city.
- 10.00 Film:** Kajaki. (2014) Premiere. A group of paratroopers are pushed to their limits while trying to find a safe route out of a minefield in Afghanistan. Fact-based thriller, starring David Elliot.
- 11.40 Film:** The Reluctant Fundamentalist. (2012) A Pakistani professor tells a journalist how he was driven to radical politics in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Drama, starring Riz Ahmed and Liev Schreiber.
- 1.40 Sign Zone: Question Time.** Topical debate from Wigton. (R) **2.00 Holby City.** (R) **3.40 This Is BBC Two.** Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

- 6.00 CITV: Bottom Knocker Street.** **6.10 Bottom Knocker Street.** (R) **6.25 Sooty.** (R) **6.35 Signed Stories:** Share a Story. (R) **6.40 Dino Dan:** Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00 Oddbods.** (R) **7.05 Marvel Monsters Assemble.** (R) **7.30 Thunderbirds Are Go!** (R) **7.45 NinjaGo: Masters of Spinjitzu.** (R) **8.25 ITV News.** **8.30 Weekend.** **9.25 Countrywide.** (R) **10.00 Peston on Sunday.** **11.00 Judge Rinder.** (R) **12.00 ITV News:** Weather.
- 12.10 Britain's Got Talent.** (R) **1.30 ITV Racing:** Live from Newmarket. Coverage of today's race meetings at Newmarket and Hamilton Park. **4.00 Film:** Diamonds Are Forever. (1971) James Bond spy adventure, starring Sean Connery.
- 6.35 Regional Programme:** Weather.
- 6.40 ITV News:** Weather.
- 7.00 Bigheads.** Jason Manford hosts the comedy game show in which contestants compete in a series of bizarre physical challenges while wearing giant model heads of Victoria Beckham, Winston Churchill, Elton John and Will.i.am. They must dodge past giant bouncers to get into a nightclub, steal champagne, and get away before the paparazzi see them. With commentary from Jenny Beckford and Kriss Akabusi.
- 8.00 The Durrells.** Louisa struggles to adapt to Larry moving out. The thought of all her children leaving her drives her to set aside her doubts about pursuing a relationship with Hugh, which leads to a revealing conversation about Vasilia. The younger Durrell children are not sure when their mother's birthday is – so plan a party anyway.
- 9.00 Grantham.** The village is rocked by a series of armed robberies. Leonard witnesses the first raid and is able to identify one of the criminals – only for the man in question to turn up dead.
- 10.00 ITV News:** Weather.
- 10.20 Peston on Sunday.** Political magazine, presented by Robert Peston. Allegro Stratton presents a guide to the latest issues on social media. (R)
- 11.40 Film:** The Reluctant Fundamentalist. (2012) A Pakistani professor tells a journalist how he was driven to radical politics in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Drama, starring Riz Ahmed and Liev Schreiber.
- 1.40 Sign Zone: Question Time.** Topical debate from Wigton. (R) **2.00 Holby City.** (R) **3.40 This Is BBC Two.** Preview of upcoming programmes.

CHANNEL 4

- 6.15 The King of Queens.** (R) **6.40 The King of Queens.** (R) **7.05 The King of Queens.** (R) **7.30 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **8.00 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **8.30 Frasier.** (R) **9.00 Frasier.** (R) **9.30 Saturday Breakfast.** 12.30 Eat the Weet. 1.30 The Thompsons. (R) **2.00 The Simpsons.** (R) **2.30 Film:** Ghostbusters II. (1989) Supernatural comedy sequel, starring Bill Murray.
- 4.40 World's Most Expensive Cars.** 5.40 George Clarke's Old House, New Home. (R)
- 6.35 Channel 4 News.**
- 7.00 Escape to Costa Rica.** Gaia Vince visits Central America's largest hydroelectric dam and the exclusion zone of an active volcano and discovers how Costa Rica has harnessed one of nature's most destructive forces to provide electricity. She also goes white water rafting to a remote eco-lodge and helps to build artificial reefs from unlikely recycling materials.
- 8.00 Film:** Captain America: The First Avenger. (2011) A puny but brave volunteer is rejected for military service during the Second World War. He becomes the test subject for an experiment that transforms him into the ultimate soldier, and battles against a secret Nazi society plotting to harness the powers of a mystical artefact. Superhero adventure, with Chris Evans, Hugo Weaving, Hayley Atwell and Tommy Lee Jones.
- 10.25 Film:** Prometheus. (2012) A spacecraft travels to another world in search of aliens that may have created the human race. Ridley Scott's sci-fi thriller, with Noomi Rapace and Michael Fassbender.
- 12.45 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA:** The Greek at the Harbour restaurant. (R) **1.30 Millionaires' Mansions:** Designing Britain's Most Exclusive Homes. The private world of luxury interior design in London. (R) **2.25 The Break Up.** Camerons follow a relationship's break up. (R) **3.15 KOTV Boxing Weekly.** Jorge Linares v Anthony Crolla. **3.40 Gillette World Sport.** With Maxence Parrot and David Villa. **4.10 Mobil 1 The Grid.** (R) **4.35 Shipping Wars UK:** Dave and Jenny transport a handcrafted rowing boat. (R) **5.05 Location, Location, Location.** Revisiting two couples who wanted a new home and business. (R)

CHANNEL 5

- 6.00 Milkshake! Mr Men.** **6.10 Milkshake! Monkey.** (R) **6.15 Peppa Pig.** (R) **6.20 Peppa Pig.** (R) **6.25 Wissper.** (R) **6.35 Paw Patrol.** (R) **6.45 Bob the Builder.** (R) **7.00 Fireman Sam.** **7.10 Olly the Dog.** (R) **7.15 Oliver and Little White Van.** (R) **7.20 Paw Patrol.** (R) **7.30 Blaze and the Monster Machines.** (R) **7.55 Noddy:** Toyland Detective. (R) **8.15 Whisper.** (R) **8.25 Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom.** (R) **8.40 Shimmer and Shine.** (R) **9.05 Little Princess.** (R) **9.20 Peppa Pig.** (R) **9.25 Peppa Pig.** (R) **9.30 Peppa Pig.** (R) **9.40 Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom.** (R) **9.55 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** (R) **10.30 Football on 5:** Goal Rush. (R) **10.55 Caught on Camera.** (R) **11.25 Police Interceptors.** (R) **12.20 Police Interceptors.** (R) **1.20 Cats & Dogs.** (2001) Comedy, starring Jeff Goldblum. **3.00 Puppies Make You Laugh Out Loud.** (R) **4.00 Cats Make You Laugh Out Loud 3.** (R) **5.00 Film:** When the Vampire Diaries 2. **1.15 The Mysterious Island.** (R) **7.00 Cricket on 5.** England v Ireland. Highlights of the second contest in the women's Ashes series, which took place at Lord's. This was the eighth overall meeting in this format of the game between these nations, and just the second to take place on English soil, following quickly from the first encounter at The Brightside Ground in Bristol last Friday.
- 8.00 Football on 5:** The Championship. Action from the final round of regular-season fixtures, including Nottingham Forest v Ipswich Town, Brentford v Blackburn Rovers, and Bristol City v Birmingham City.
- 8.55 5 News Weekend.**
- 9.00 When Magic Goes Wrong.** Illusions that went spectacularly badly, including stories of magicians' brushes with death, as well as mishaps involving Dynamo, Paul Daniels and David Blaine. (R)
- 10.00 Comedy Gold:** TV's Funniest Ever Sketches. Compilation of classic comedy sketches from TV's most popular stars.
- 11.25 Football on 5:** The Play-offs. Action from the League One play-off semi-finals, as the teams battled for a place in the play-off final at Wembley Stadium on Saturday 20 May.
- 12.00 Film:** Bangkok Dangerous. (2008) **1.45 SuperCasino.** **3.10 Top 20 Funniest.** (R) **4.00 Criminals:** Caught on Camera. (R)

DIGITAL

- BBC Four**
- 7.00 The Birth of British Music.** 8.00 The Secret Life of the Motorway.
- Betroffenheit from Sadler's Wells 10.50 Seven Ages of Starlight 12.20 The Story of Maths 1.20 The BBC at War 2.20 Britain's Nuclear Secrets: Inside Sellafield 3.20 Close

- ITV2**
- 11.20 Take Me Out 12.40 Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **1.40 FYI Daily 4.15 Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **2.30 Film:** Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous (2005) **3.30 FYI Daily 3.35 Film:** Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous (2005) **4.00 Film:** Mr. Bean's Holiday 5.00 Britain's Got More Talent 7.05 Film: Evan Almighty (2007) **8.05 FYI Daily 8.10 Film:** Evan Almighty (2007) **8.00 Take Me Out - The Gossip 10.00 Family Guy 11.30 American Dad! 12.25 The Cleveland Show 1.25 The Vampire Diaries 2.15 The Hot Desk: Jonas Blue 2.25 Teleshopping 5.55 ITV2 Nightscreen**

- ITV3**
- 11.15 Live British Touring Car Championship.** **6.20 Football Rivalries**

- 6.30 Pawn Stars 7.00 Fishing Impossible 8.00 Premiership Football Union 9.00 Bars 10.00 Film:** Unforgiven (1992) **11.00 FYI Daily 11.05 Film:** Unforgiven (1992) **12.40 British Superbike Championship Highlights 1.45 BRDC Formula 3 Championship Highlights 2.45 ITV4 Nightscreen 3.00 Teleshopping**

- F4**
- 1.30 Brooklyn Nine-Nine 2.00 New Girl 2.30 Ruude(ish) Tube Shorts 2.40 The Big Bang Theory 4.40 Film:** The Spy Next Door (2010) **6.30 The Big Bang Theory 9.00** **Mars' Agents of SHIELD 10.00** **Tattoo Fixers 12.05 Rude Tube:** Love Bytes 1.10 First Dates 2.15 E4's Tattoo Artist of the Year 3.05 Marvel's Agents of SHIELD 3.50 Hollyoaks
- Film4**
- 1.00 Gulliver's Travels (2010) 2.35 Rugrats Go Wild (2003) 4.10 The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (2010) 6.20 The Wizard of Oz (2010) 9.00 A Million Ways to Die in the West (2014) 11.15 Magic Mike (2012) **1.30 The Runaways (2010) 3.45 Close****

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FILM CHOICES**MONDAY****Parker, Channel 5, 11.05pm**

A thief is betrayed and left for dead by his partners in crime. He learns they are planning a diamond heist in a wealthy neighbourhood, so poses as a millionaire wanting to buy a house in the area. A real-estate agent sees through the disguise and helps him get even by stealing the gems from his gang. Action thriller, with Jason Statham and Jennifer Lopez. (2013)

TUESDAY**Bone to Pick: Teagarden Mystery, Channel 5, 3.15pm**

Librarian sleuth Aurora Teagarden inherits a house when her friend unexpectedly dies and discovers her new home has a skull hidden in a window seat. Mystery, starring Candace Cameron Bure, Peter Benson and Dave Collette. (2015)

WEDNESDAY**Home, BBC1, 11.45pm**

A British family leave their home for what at first appears to be a holiday, but their trip soon turns out to be a very different kind of journey. Short drama, starring Jack O'Connell and Holliday Grainger. (2016)



Win a Date with Tad Hamilton!, Friday, BBC1, 11.55pm

THURSDAY**My Family's Secret, Channel 5, 3.15pm**

A man attempts suicide, leaving a cryptic note claiming he may have caused his sister's death. His wife goes back to his home town in search of answers and asks his brother for help. She does not realise her brother-in-law has a split personality, and digging up the past brings out his more dangerous aspects. Thriller, starring Nicholle Tom and Dylan Neal. (2010)

FRIDAY**Win a Date with Tad Hamilton!, BBC1, 11.55pm**

A screen idol's reputation is damaging his career, so his manager comes up with a plan to rehabilitate the actor's public image by giving ordinary women across America the chance to win a date with him. The prize eventually goes to a supermarket checkout girl – much to the annoyance of her best friend, who has secretly carried a torch for her for years. Romantic comedy, with Kate Bosworth and Topher Grace. (2004)

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15/5	5	Dover/Canterbury	9/7	6	Durham and Northumbria
15/5	5	Eastbourne (more dates)	14/7	5	Falmouth
20/5	5	Great Yarmouth	19/7	5	Llandudno (more dates)
22/5	5	Cornwall (Looe)(more dates)	23/7	7	Scotland Fort William
22/5	6	Highland Railways	31/7	5	North Devon Bideford
29/5	5	Ilfracombe	31/7	5	Isle of Scilly
5/6	4	Tenby (more dates)	11/8	3	Liverpool and Merseyside
5/6	5	Bournemouth (more dates)	26/8	6	Ireland The Giants Causeway
5/6	5	Warners Thornsby Hall	3/9	5	Suffolk Village
12/6	5	Isle of Wight (more dates)	25/9	5	Criccieth
16/6	4	Paignton/Torquay (more dates)	29/9	5	Isle of Man
22/6	5	Sidmouth (more dates)	10/10	8	Channel Islands
26/6	5	Babbacombe	2/12	2	Bath Christmas Market
26/6	5	Weston Super Mare (more dates)	9/12	3	Thursford Spectacular
01/7	8	Weymouth (more dates)	MORE WARNER HOLIDAYS AVAILABLE		
3/7	5	Scarborough	THROUGHOUT THE YEAR		

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Judges John and Gregg have served up a treat for the final

MasterChef fans are a loyal lot. It's genuinely accepted these days that the show only becomes compulsive viewing in the final week, so top marks if you've managed to stay the course again throughout its 12th series.

At least there have been plenty of variety in the tasks, as increasingly svelte pudding-king Gregg Wallace and sidekick John Torode have gone about their business whittling down the original 64 contenders.

There have been Calling Cards, Invention Tests, Critic's Meals and Chef's Tables, as well as heats, knockout weeks, team relays and trips abroad.

Some would say it's almost as confusing as the cooks' complicated dishes.

This week has already been a grueling one for the finalists attempting to bake, fry, steam, roast and boil their way to success.

On Monday, the remaining five went to Winfield House, the official residence of the US ambassador to the UK, where they had just four

hours to serve a five-course dinner with an American theme for the diplomat and his guests, under the watchful eye of Michelin-starred chef Paul Ainsworth.

Then on Wednesday, the surviving four embarked on a culinary adventure in South Africa, where their skills will be pushed to the limit in three demanding tests involving a braai (a traditional South African barbecue), a lunch service at The Test Kitchen, ranked as one the world's top 25 restaurants, and a dinner fit for Cape Town's cultural and culinary elite.

Then last night, the chefs were whittled down again as they faced the toughest challenge of the competition – the Chef's Table.

First, they were out to impress judges Wallace and Torode with a classic dish that bears their own personal stamp.

Then the remaining trio got the chance to cook a three-course lunch menu alongside modern culinary legend Sat Bains at his two-Michelin-starred restaurant in Nottingham.

However, to add to the pressure, a table of the UK's finest chefs – Shaun Rankin, Steve Groves, Tom Kitchin, Paul Ainsworth, Ashley Palmer-Watts and Clare Smyth – were waiting with knives and forks in hand to sample their efforts.

Tonight, the formidable seven-week contest reaches its climax and the finalists are pushed to the limit one last time.

This is their chance to show everything they have learned, and over three hours demonstrate what sort of cook they have become.

They must produce three exceptional courses, push the culinary boundaries and give the judges an awe-inspiring tasting.

Then it's over to Wallace and Torode to decide which of the trio deserves to succeed last year's victor Jane Devonshire and be crowned MasterChef Champion 2017.

Despite MasterChef the series being a slog at times, this final should, like any mouthwatering starter dish, leave fans wanting more.



John Torode and Gregg Wallace in MasterChef: The Finals, Friday, BBC1, 8.30pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY**Inside the Gang: Young Blood****Channel 5, 9pm**

On some of Britain's toughest estates, gangs are increasingly a way of life. But just what does being a member involve, and what happens to the recruits who decide they want out? Those are the questions at the heart of the first edition of a new series, which sets out to expose the truth about British gangs. Veteran members, known as 'olders', reveal how younger members are attracted by the lure of money, girls and fast cars, only to find themselves being used to sell drugs and carry out acts of violence. But some of these 'olders' are shocked by just how far the new generation is prepared to go.

Little Boy Blue**ITV, 9pm**

With the dream team of writer Jeff Pope (one of the brains behind Philomena and Cilla) and star Stephen Graham on board, this has turned into one of the most compelling dramas of the year. And this week's offering does little to diminish its impact. When potential witness Claire Olszen is intimidated into changing her statement, the investigation team look for alternative ways to reinforce their case. As Steve returns to work, Kelly is offered a deal that tests his resolve. Sinead Keenan also stars.

TUESDAY**Elizabeth I: Battle for the Throne****Channel 5, 9pm**

Many big stars have played Elizabeth I, from Bette Davis to Helen Mirren, Judi Dench to Cate Blanchett, Quvenzhané Wallis to Glenda Jackson and beyond. Now model-turned-actress Lily Cole is taking on the mantel of Good Queen Bess in this three-part docudrama; Suzannah Lipscomb and Dan Jones present the documentary parts. The first edition focuses on Elizabeth's early life, which saw her declared illegitimate, banished from court and frozen out of Henry VIII's life following the beheading of her mother, Anne Boleyn. She was then third in line to the throne; the premature deaths of her half-siblings Edward and Mary paved the way for her coronation at the age of 25 – her road to the crown had been a rocky one, and there were other obstacles looming on the horizon.

WEDNESDAY**Quadruplets and Homeless****Channel 4, 10pm**

After 10 years of trying to have a child together, Aynur and Tony are surprised to hear the news

they have four coming along all at once. With quadruplets on the way and no home of their own, the couple move in with Aynur's supportive, traditional Turkish parents. Although they do not always see eye to eye, Tony is determined to prove to her family that he will be committed when their new arrivals are born, despite his struggles with alcohol.

THURSDAY
The Truth About Sleep
BBC1, 9pm

Medical journalist and chronic insomniac Michael Mosley journeys into the world of sleep, finding out what it is and what happens to someone if they do not get enough. Michael seeks to discover whether his own insomnia runs in the family, sending off a blood sample for DNA analysis, and meets Dr Eleanor Scott in Leeds who is doing research into a possible link between Type 2 diabetes and lack sleep.



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Sudoku

8			1	6				
8	6		3					
6	3			5	9	2		
	9		6		5			
8	5	4			2			
1	2			4	3	8		
	3	1	2					
4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	7	9	1	5	8	3	6	4
8	3	1	4	9	6	2	7	5
6	5	4	7	3	2	8	9	1
9	1	2	3	6	4	5	8	7
5	6	8	2	1	7	9	4	3
3	4	7	5	8	9	6	1	2
1	8	3	6	7	5	4	2	9
7	2	6	9	4	3	1	5	8
4	9	5	8	2	1	7	3	6

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Infantryman; 9 Invoice; 10 Asset; 11 Helot; 12 Extract; 13 Escort; 15 Spinal; 18 Senegal; 20 Token; 22 Overt; 23 Whereas; 24 Temporarily; Down: 2 Novel; 3 Aviator; 4 Thebes; 5 Yeast; 6 Abstain; 7 High tension; 8 Stateliness; 14 Concede; 16 Patient; 17 Flower; 18 Get-up; 21 Kneel.
QUICK - Across: 1 Information; 9 Retreat; 10 Refer; 11 Sides; 12 Nominal; 13 Chosen; 15 Assess; 18 Treasury; 20 Eatent; 22 Oracle; 23 Express; 24 Tree and easy. Down: 2 Noted; 3 Overseer; 4 Mutily; 5 Thrum; 6 Offence; 7 Prosecution; 8 Antlessness; 14 Open-air; 16 Steeple; 17 Unseen; 19 Sieve; 21 Tress.

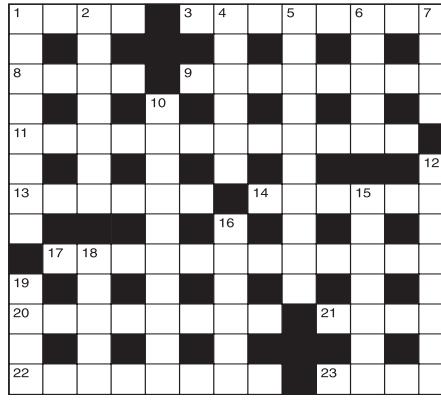
Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:
Across

- Even well-done steaks are nowadays! (4)
- Strung up (8)
- Forbid a rigged vote (4)
- American prison with emphasis on harmony? (4-4)
- Wait to start a game of ping-pong? (5,2,5)
- Native found in bed (6)
- Amuse touchingly (6)
- They often invite you to their houses (6,6)
- A diet put out for fitness (8)
- Song needs a tuneful backing (4)
- Indeed not all went (8)
- The advantage being sharp gives one? (4)

- The last thing those taking exams should do (8)
- Sends back the proceeds (7)
- They raise this so awkwardly (6)
- Impressions of some artists (10)
- Not only soldiers may be bored by it (5)
- Appreciates accommodation (4)
- He does well with his money (10)
- Picture which has a main theme (8)
- Relatively gentle colour? (7)
- Has it a piercing eye? Just the opposite (6)
- Beg to put off retirement (3,2)
- Music circle (4)

**Quick Clues:****Across**

- Slender (4)
- Boiling vessel (8)
- Spindle (4)
- Likely (8)
- Irresistible (12)
- Oppose (6)
- Unchanging (6)
- Showed (12)
- Detached (8)
- Nothing (4)
- Thwarts (8)
- Music circle (4)

Down

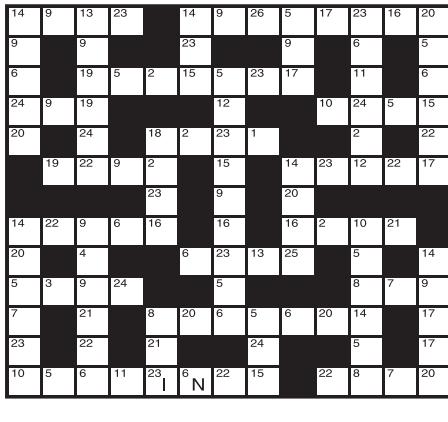
- Coastline (8)
- Malady (7)
- Missiles (6)
- Scientific workroom (10)
- Redbreast (5)
- Require (4)
- Bishops (10)
- Precipitately (8)
- To and from (7)
- Agree (6)
- Call forth (5)
- Flaccid (4)

BRAIN GYM

No.428

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
D	P	C	M	L	J	E	O	G	T	Y	U	W	
Q	N	K	A	B	I	V	X	R	H	F	Z	S	

Quiz

- What was Charles Sherwood Stratton's nickname?
- In which religion are the Veda the most sacred scriptures?
- Where did Body Shop's Anita Roddick open her first shop?
- Who wrote the musical Oliver!?
- Of what is the predatory crown-of-thorns a variety?
- Which North African capital is known in Arabic as Tarabulus al-Gharb?
- What type of creature is a mara?
- Over how many days is a decathlon held?
- Which 1930s film star married three oil millionaires?
- In which county is the village of Stilton?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 An insect; 2 Poland; 3 Spike Milligan; 4 Thomas Stamford Raffles; 5 Sea of Galilee; 6 Basil Hume; 7 Laurens van der Post; 8 Vesuvius; 9 William the Conqueror; 10 Verona.
Niner: REICHSTAG

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

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gives a flower,
gives a plant,
gives a weed.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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Inside story – The Belfry Hotel and resort lobby



And relax – the indoor pool and spa at The Belfry



The sweeping entrance and lovely gardens at The Belfry hotel



Choice of three golf courses

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FROM the minute you drive up the winding driveway to The Belfry you are struck by the luxury and class of this hotel and resort.

A chandelier of golf clubs provides a dramatic entrance to The Belfry's reception and that's before you take in the Brabazon Bar in its art deco style.

Our 10-year-old son has taken up golf and keen to do things as a family we decided to try our hand at the sport.

It was with this new and shared interest in a 'frustrating but fun' sport that we thought we would visit The Belfry at Wishaw, near Sutton Coldfield. Just an hour's drive from home you could say that it is virtually on our doorstep.

The Belfry is synonymous with golf and has been home to the Ryder Cup four times – it has played host to more Ryder Cup matches than any other venue in the world.

Our family room had a balcony overlooking the stunning Brabazon course. Its manicured greens and majestic fairways have challenged the biggest legends of the golfing world.

By Lisa Bailey

It was glorious to be able to stand on the balcony and look out at this iconic course.

We started the day with a family lesson at the PGA Golf Academy – it's the only PGA branded golf academy in England.

The academy was a hive of activity and we were swept away by senior PGA coach Derek Simpson to our session in one of the five individual custom fitting suites. An hour flew by with Derek giving us a masterclass on our swing – watching and then videoing our technique in detail.

Our posture and swing were compared to Tiger Woods (a tad unfair I think!), but it was so interesting to see how all three of us performed. Derek was professional and his great sense of humour kept us entertained and enthusiastic.

The hour's lesson was a warm up for our game later in the day. The Belfry has three courses – Brabazon as mentioned, the PGA National which has hosted two European tour events and The Derby.

The Derby is a parkland course and is perfect for players of all levels. As beginners

it was the course for us. A little daunted at first, we teed off and thoroughly enjoyed the nine holes we played of the 18-hole tree-lined course. Described as a gentle challenge, it posed more of a difficult task for the three of us.

The class of the hotel is on a par with the fantastic golf courses. It seems to cater for all. For families it has the indoor pool, woodland walk and The Belfry's Ryder Legends Mini Golf course – a 12-hole course inspired by the legendary Ryder Cup courses.

Classics

For couples there is the luxury spa with treatments and the unique experience of Fire & Ice featuring 12 bio-thermal rooms. There is also the AA Rosette restaurant The Ryder Grill, where you can enjoy a la carte dining and stunning views of the golf course while watching the open plan kitchen.

And, if you are there for business, there are 22 conference and event rooms, as well as the golf, restaurants, bars, a night club and spa. In 2013, The Belfry underwent a £26 million renovation. Further work has

since been carried out to the spa and other areas of the four-star hotel and resort.

Food at the resort can be either casual or à la carte in The Ryder Grill. Rocca's Pizza Pasta Restaurant hit the spot on the first night with a menu of Italian classics. The casual surroundings were ideal with various parties coming in through the evening – most did not seem to be staying at the hotel, but had travelled to the hotel.

Tomato and buffalo mozzarella, stuffed mini calzone and spicy chicken rigatoni were just some of the delicious dishes we had. Our son had his eye on Rocca's Chocolate Amore – a layered chocolate heaven cake – for dessert, but unfortunately he did not leave any room.

From the minute we arrived to the moment we left, service at The Belfry was outstanding. Staff wherever we went were polite and professional, and seemed to go that extra mile. It was also so nice to see younger members of staff were courteous. My husband and I passed comment after our visit that we had not encountered such friendly staff in a large venue before.

The Belfry was a wonderful place to spend family time together.

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Impressive seven-seater from the Skoda stable

By Ian Donaldson

How gratifying it must be for Skoda – a brand always strong on value – to see customers lining up to spend more than they could get away with.

For nearly everyone ordering a new Skoda Kodiaq, the firm's first seven seater, wants the version that sits near the top of the range, not near the bottom.

The Kodiaq (its name alluding to a bear found in Alaska) is available from £21,565 but 85 per cent of potential purchasers want posher ones costing more than £7,000 extra.

That surely signals Skoda's warranted arrival among cars that are fancied for their looks and ability more than their list price. A drive in the newcomer says the first owners of a Kodiaq made the right choice.

The Kodiaq is a genuinely spacious car, with three rows of seats in the upper two trim levels (SE L and Edition) with the rearmost pair capable of comfortably seating a couple of young teenagers. They might have to scramble past a second row of seats that slide forward but whose bases don't tilt upward, but the Kodiaq is going to be an answer for families sometimes called on to transport kids to football.

Better still, even with the third row in use there's the same amount of luggage space behind them that you might find in your average small hatchback – so enough for a decent shop. Fold all the seats down and the Kodiaq could probably house its namesake.



There's so much space in the rear

You can't opt for the third row in the entry level Kodiaq S and it costs £1,000 on the next grade up (SE) but almost all the early adopters are buying three-rowed versions anyway. They'll also favour a Kodiaq with a 150 horsepower 2.0 litre diesel, the same unit that does sterling service in a host of other Volkswagen Group cars, from Audi through SEAT to VW itself. It costs from £27,114 in an SE level car, equipped with a 6-speed DSG automatic gearbox. Also on offer is a 190 horsepower diesel and a trio of petrol engines, two 1.4 litres offering 125 or 150 horsepower and a more powerful 2.0 litre petrol with 180 horses. The lowest powered petrol model is the only Kodiaq available with a manual 6-speed gearbox and front wheel drive.

All the rest of the range comes with either an auto box or on-demand all-wheel drive, or both. They're both on parade in the current range topping Edition, at £34,050 and coming with the 150 horsepower diesel, whose 144g/km tailpipe emissions promise a reasonable £200 road tax hit from new under the latest Treasury revamp.

Most powerful engine at present is the 190 horsepower 2.0 litre diesel, available in a single SL trim version for £33,110. Later in the year we'll see a Scout model with more obvious off-road looks and then a SportLine.

There's a sense of real solidity in the Kodiaq's cabin. Everything, from simplest switch to the satellite navigation system on the SE L and Edition models does its job so well you know many candles have been burned at both ends to make things just ... well, work.

The entry level S, with just a 1.4 petrol engine, has LED daytime running lights, manual air conditioning, 17 inch alloy wheels, DAB radio and SmartLink to easily connect your smartphone. Up a grade, to SE and we find 18 inch alloys, cruise control, rear parking sensors, dual zone climate control and auto dimming mirrors.

The likely most popular level – SE L, tops up these goodies with sat nav, still larger (19 inch) alloys, powered tailgate, Alcantara trim and heated front seats.

Topping the Kodiaq tree, the Edition piles on leather upholstery, metallic paint and chrome roof rails. Added techno features include lane assist, high beam assist and wireless charging for a compatible mobile phone.

Depending on model, you'll also find evidence of Skoda's Simply Clever thinking, from umbrella hidden in a front door to ice scraper sitting in the fuel filler flap.

But back to the ride in an SE L 150 diesel. It's no ball of fire (9.5 seconds to 0-62mph), but plenty potent enough for satisfactory progress and quiet with it.

A journey's end 50.5mpg on the dash readout (the official average is 52.3mpg) hinted that longer term acquaintance with a Kodiaq would only cement a positive relationship with an impressive new Skoda.



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Penn's Sandeep Dhillon keeps wicket as Springvale's Matt Bennett bats



Wednesbury bowler Sajid Nazir bowls to Matt Axton, at Wednesbury Sports Union and Cricket Club



Paceman Dan Wale will spearhead Pelsall's attack this year



Ex-Pelsall man Steve Blews has joined Hammerwich

Bentley bag cup against Casuals

AFC BENTLEY proved they were up for the cup as they picked up the GA Evans Cup after a 2-0 win against Otter & Vixen in the final at Wolverhampton Casuals. AFC Jacks are favourites to lift the Premier Division title after clocking up their 10th win in 12 league outings. A 2-1 success at Emerald Athletic put Jacks level on points with leaders Diffusion.

Huf UK are still battling for Division One glory. A 6-2 win against All Saints Athletic leaves them five points behind leaders Gospel Oak. Frying Pan Darlaston were 2-0 winners at home to Wednesfield Red Lion while Punjab United Sports crushed Grapes 6-0. Division Two champions Old Bulls Head maintained their unbeaten run with a 3-1 triumph at SWL Spartak. The mid-table clash between Balls to Cancer and Malthouse ended up 2-1 in Malthouse's favour. The race for the Division Three title continued with the top two both tasting success. Andrew Turvey had a four-goal blast as leaders Belgrave turned on the power to an 8-1 success away to Dynamo 50 Stile. Second-placed Warstones Wanderers marched to a 6-0 win on home soil against Churchill Rovers, while Royal George went down 3-1 to Tettenhall Royal Oak. Wolves Pride boosted their hopes of being crowned Division Four champions by beating Ashmore 11-0.

Cricket clubs looking to hit their rivals for six

SPORTING MEMORIES

By Jack Bradley

THE Staffordshire Club Cricket Championship Premier Division season has opened up with 12 teams vying for glory.

Milford Hall took the spoils last summer and a place in the Birmingham League, but who will be successful this year? We take a look at the top flight line-up.

Aldridge CC

Captain: Dan Shortland

One to watch: Royeth Hussain

Aldridge go into the season with a new philosophy after a campaign that saw them finish soundly in mid-table in 2016. This summer will see the side line-up with more fresh faces, having done the majority of their recruitment internally by promoting players from their youth team. Captain Dan Shortland believes that approach will prove to be exciting at least. "We are excited really," he said. "We are looking to change the focus of the club as we have lost about five members of the first team. Now we have a lot of younger players stepping up. In particular, this is the year that I am looking forward to seeing the emergence of Royeth Hussain."

Beacon CC

Captain: Daniel Green

One to watch: Tom Bingham

Having finished runners-up for the past two seasons, Beacon will have a new man in charge this summer with Dan Green taking on the lead role. It's an opportunity that Green is relishing, having started his playing days as a youngster at the club. "I am really looking forward to it," he said. "I have played for Beacon since I was a young lad and it is something I always really wanted to do." Green predicts the usual suspects will be in the mix for title glory. "There is the usual teams – Pelsall and Penn are always tough and then teams like Cannock and Hammerwich, who are always towards the top of the table," he said.

Cannock CC

Captain: Will Fleet

One to watch: Adam Benton

What could be considered a new project is being undertaken at Cannock, as the club is trying to develop both on and off the pitch after last season's third-placed finish. The season ahead will still be about de-

veloping the club. "We were never really in the mix to get promoted in the end," said skipper Will Fleet. "It's a good experience, though. Now, we are hoping to just make sure we carry on improving the team." Improvement could come in the form of overseas player Nick Trebilcock – a left-handed batsman from New Zealand – while Adam Benton and Matt Cotterill are both tipped to impress by Fleet. Off the pitch, the club also has plans to develop a new clubhouse.

Pelsall CC

Captain: Richard Homer

One to watch: Paul Baker

Springvale make their return to the Premier Division after winning Division One. The team were relegated in 2015 but managed to bounce back at the first time of asking. "It's exciting being back in the league – winning the league last year to come back up was a big accomplishment," said captain Richard Homer. "Our main target is staying up this year." Springvale's bid will be aided by the arrival of experienced former Walsall opening batsman Paul Baker and off-spinner David Geran, while Paul Baker who has previously opened the batting at Walsall and is an ex-Birmingham league player will be one to watch for the forthcoming campaign.

Penn CC

Captain: Mark Green

One to watch: Sandeep Dhillon

Penn will be another team going into the campaign with a new captain leading the charge with Mark Green stepping up. Green is relishing the prospect of leading his side – a favourite by many to contend for the title. "It's my first time as captain this year, so hopefully we can push for the title," he said. "It's a strong side and we have added a few players who will come in and help a lot." One of those players is former Himley and Brewood paceman Danny Smith, pictured left, while a more familiar face, Sandeep Dhillon, is the one to watch this season. "Sandeep is opening batsman and he's a strong player with lots of experience from the Birmingham League and in the Staffs League," explained Green.

Hammerwich CC
Captain: John Jennings
One to watch: Ben Novis

Hammerwich will begin their campaign having made three new additions in the bowling department, bringing in Steve Blews, Jamie Holmes and Ben Novis. Coming off the back of a steady season last year in which they finished fourth in the standings, captain John Jennings believes the additions will help push on an already strong side. "We matched any team that we played last year," said Jennings, "The new players will make us stronger this season. We're looking forward to it now, especially as we have brought in these new players."

Pelsall CC
Captain: Danny Pennell
One to watch: Jake Lee

Pelsall will be looking to build on their fifth-place finish, with their relegation hangover no longer looming from the 2015 campaign. The club have gone through a period of transition with players coming and going, but skipper Danny Pennell believes they have added a lot of quality. "It's been quite transitional really but we have brought in four really good players," he said. "Jake Lee, Tom Wright, Dan Wale and Australian Thomas Gravina have all come in. They bring much more athleticism in the field. There has really been an influx of youth." Regarding 'one to watch' Jake Lee, Pennell believes he is at the right club at the right time to progress.

Rugeley CC
Captain: Scott Gretton
One to watch: Ali Fawcett

Rugeley club captain Scott Gretton has been quick to emphasise the quality of his team before their season-opener against Penn as they look forward to competing in the top flight following last season's promotion. Gretton said: "I'm very excited about the season because it's a very competitive league. We have got people who joined the club last season but could not play due to work commitments now available which will make a difference." Regarding the arrival of Australian overseas player Nathan Timbrell, Gretton added: "He wants to come over here and get some more experience. It is exciting because he has played at a decent standard of cricket in Australia."

Ex-Albion and Villa man is Cowes boss

FORMER Albion and Villa winger Steve Hunt has been appointed manager of Cowes Sports on the Isle of Wight.

The 60-year-old, who won two caps for England in 1984, was named boss of the ninth-tier team on the last day of the season after they assured their Sydenhams Premier League survival.

Hunt's only previous managerial experience came at Willenhall Town in the late 1980s, although he also worked as a youth team coach for Port Vale and Leicester City.

Cowes Sports FC made the announcement on their Facebook page, saying: "We're delighted to announce that former Coventry, West Brom, Villa and England winger Steve Hunt is our New 1st Team manager. Welcome Steve!"

The Sydenhams Premier League feeds into Southern League Division One South and West.

Until Jade Livermore featured against Germany last month, Hunt held the record as the last West Bromwich Albion outfield player to line up for England.

Early goal and league leaders left lacking

Wolves Women 3 Loughborough Foxes 2

WOLVES Women's last home game of the season gave fans a thrilling 3-2 victory over league leaders Loughborough Foxes.

Wolves made their early pressure pay in the eighth minute as Captain Anna Perks headed home from a Jen Anslow corner. Loughborough got the equaliser in the 17th minute as Cooper slotted the ball past the oncoming Chloe Evans, colliding with her as the ball trickled into the net.

Wolves' hard work paid off in the 36th minute as they regained their lead from a Jodie Bragan header, making it 2-1 at the break. It didn't take long to score again as Bragan headed in her second, and Wolves' third, from a Laura McQuillan corner. Loughborough's persistence paid off in the 77th minute as Eastham's shot went over the top of Evans and into the net, making it 3-2 to set up a nervy finale.

Wolves had a penalty appeal waved away in the 85th minute before a shot from Jade Cross which was saved by the keeper.

With Loughborough pressing Wolves maintained their composure and stood firm to record an impressive victory in a thrilling game.

Sport

SPORTS DESK 01902 319531

Dozen line up for start of season

See page 39



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Skipper has put batsmen on notice

HALESOWEN skipper Richard Brooker admits he's concerned about his side after they slumped to defeat at Coventry.

And he's vowed to get to the bottom of the issue which saw them bowled out for just 88 runs after getting the hosts out for a mediocre 140.

Brooker said: "Having bowled and fielded pretty well in the early part of the game to restrict Coventry to 140 we should have knocked them off with some comfort. That we didn't is of some concern at this early stage in the season as Cov are not perceived to be front-runners in the league this year."

"We will talk with the batters at the club and work out a way round the issues of the weekend but this level of approach to batting cannot continue if we are to have a successful season."

"We have to put a marker down where standards are concerned at this club and that didn't reach what we have discussed."

"Although it's early days and we have time to settle in we need to change our approach."

In the bowling department the wickets were shared by Eddie Rhodes (2-20) Hassan Quami (2-18) Brooker (2-25) and Dylan Ross Watt (2-33).

But with the bat only Ed Kilbee (27) showed any form as Owen were bowled out for just 88 in 31 overs.

The second and third team also endured defeats against Shifnal and West Malvern respectively whilst the fourths picked up a victory over Astwood Bank.

The second team were defeated by 69 runs with only Mohammed Shaib (43) and Luke Miley (32) showing with the bat whilst the 3rds lost by 39 runs with Carl Bust retuning figures of 3-24 and Jon Webb striking a quickfire 38.

The 4ths were indebted to Vince O Grady (56) and Riaz Khan (46) for their four wicket victory.

DK runner tested by MK marathon's three hour target

THERE was more marathon action at the weekend for athletes from Dudley Kingswinford Running Club at a Bank Holiday date in Milton Keynes.

With many already having posted a decent time over the 26.2 mile distance it was the turn of a couple of hoops to try their luck over the ultimate test of club runners.

Simon Hughes went off looking to break the magical three hour mark but although he was on target at 20 miles the final six was a real test. He was still able to finish in a more than respectable time of 3:16.46 to take 122nd place.

Samantha Hemming recorded a new personal best over the distance coming home in 4:41.20 to take 1450 position overall and 314th lady in what she claimed was one of the hardest courses she'd ever raced.

Twenty four hours earlier, over 6.2 miles, a group took part in the Great Birmingham 10k. Bob Jones completed the first of three 10k races in a week coming home in 47.56 in 78th place, Malcolm Beddall was 1862nd in 53.34 and Tony Nocke finished in 53.55 in 1928th.

Walking football tournament tribute



Hartshill Strollers, wearing bibs, in action

A FOOTBALL tournament in memory of a much-loved player so nearly had a fairy tale ending.

The Steve Bragg Memorial Tournament was held at Summerhill School, Kingswinford, on Sunday, April 23.

The event – organised by Hartshill Strollers Walking Football Club – attracted eight teams from as far afield as Leicestershire.

The tournament was named in memory of Strollers member Steve Bragg who died from a heart attack while on holiday in Spain in April 2016. The father-of-two from Tividale was just 51.

Among the competing teams were Old Studs

which consisted of Steve's old friends and his son, James.

Old Studs – a hastily-assembled outfit – won through to the final but were beaten 1-0 by LPF88, of Leicestershire.

Mark Grazier, chairman of Hartshill Strollers, said: "It was a fantastic tournament – the first in the club's history – played in perfect weather.

"It was particularly poignant that Old Studs did so well, just falling at the final hurdle. They played exceptionally well. Steve was a highly-gifted and much loved member of Hartshill Strollers. His untimely death shocked everyone. LPF88 put out hosts Hartshill Strollers 3-1.

Harris and Burton clinch Cradley win

CRADLEY returned to winning ways with a 48-42 win over a battling Lakeside team in the second half of last night's Monmore double-header.

The Heathens always held the advantage although they were never allowed to take full control with the Hammers offering stubborn resistance, helped by the late booking of former Cradley rider Nathan Greaves as a guest.

Heathens weren't helped by a series of mechanical issues in the early stages with Dan Greenwood and Joe Lawlor both missing rides but they took the first 5-1 of the match in a dramatic heat four.

Danny Ayres got the better of Greaves in a fiercely-contested first lap, and Greaves came to grief on the exit of turn four allowing Ryan Burton through to complete a maximum advantage.

Greaves returned to defeat home skipper Tom Perry in heat six as the Hammers narrowed the gap to four points. Conor Dwyer recovered from a sluggish opening to make a fast gate in heat eight, and he was all set for a 5-1 with Perry in heat 10 only for Lakeside's David Mason to crash heavily on the second lap.

With Mason disqualified, the rerun saw Alfie Bowtell split Perry and Dwyer, but Heathens extended their lead to 10 points in tough heat 11 as Ayres just saw off the challenge of his former Kent team-mate Ben Morley.

But when they clashed again two races later, Ayres made an error to allow Morley and Greaves through, and as he tried to recover he sent Greaves into the fence and was disqualified, to hand the Hammers a 5-1.

However, Luke Harris and Burton ended the visitors' hopes of a comeback with a match-clinching 4-2 in heat 14, although Morley's smart pass of Ayres in the final race did ensure they took a deserved consolation league point.

Fierce start in the swimming league

HALESOWEN Swimmers travelled to Solihull on Saturday for round one of the Mercian League.

The league attracts clubs from across the West Midlands so competition is fierce and Saturday was no exception.

Despite many strong performances Halesowen finished the evening fifth. Event winners were Greg Sheppard in the 12 and under 100m breaststroke and Emily Jay in the girls' open age 100m individual medley (by just 100th of a second!). Final scores were Leamington 228, Coventry 219, Solihull 191, Redditch 144, Halesowen 138 and Cannock Phoenix 120.

★★★
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Gary Hackett looks dejected after defeat in the final



A dejected Stuart Pierpoint as Glassboys defeated



Luke Benbow in action during the Evo-Stik Northern Premier League play-off final

felt he officiated pretty poorly, there was a lot of man-handling going on and he seemed to let it all go.

"At times, they were wrestling with (Luke) Benbow and (Jordan) Archer and how they were not fouls when they had grabbed people around the neck I will never know."

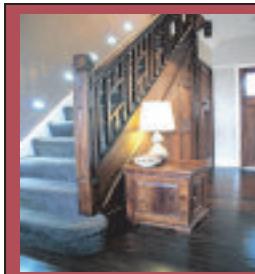
The Glassboys had flattered to deceive in the final third until the last knockings when Luke Benbow and then Kennedy Digie forced top-class saves from home keeper Dan Lawson.

"But there could be no denying the hosts deserved to win with inspirational Stour stopper

Matt Gould thwarting striker Glen Taylor time and again.

Visiting boss Gary Hackett made one change from the XI that started the extra-time victory over Nantwich Town in Monday's semi-final with Kayelden Brown replacing Shrewsbury Town loanee Ethan Jones.

Home hearts were in mouths when Benbow's fierce free-kick was pushed around the post and in the chaos from the corner, Digie's close-range blast was turned around the upright by another classy Lawson stop. Gould went up for one late surge but resolute Spennymoor hacked clear.



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